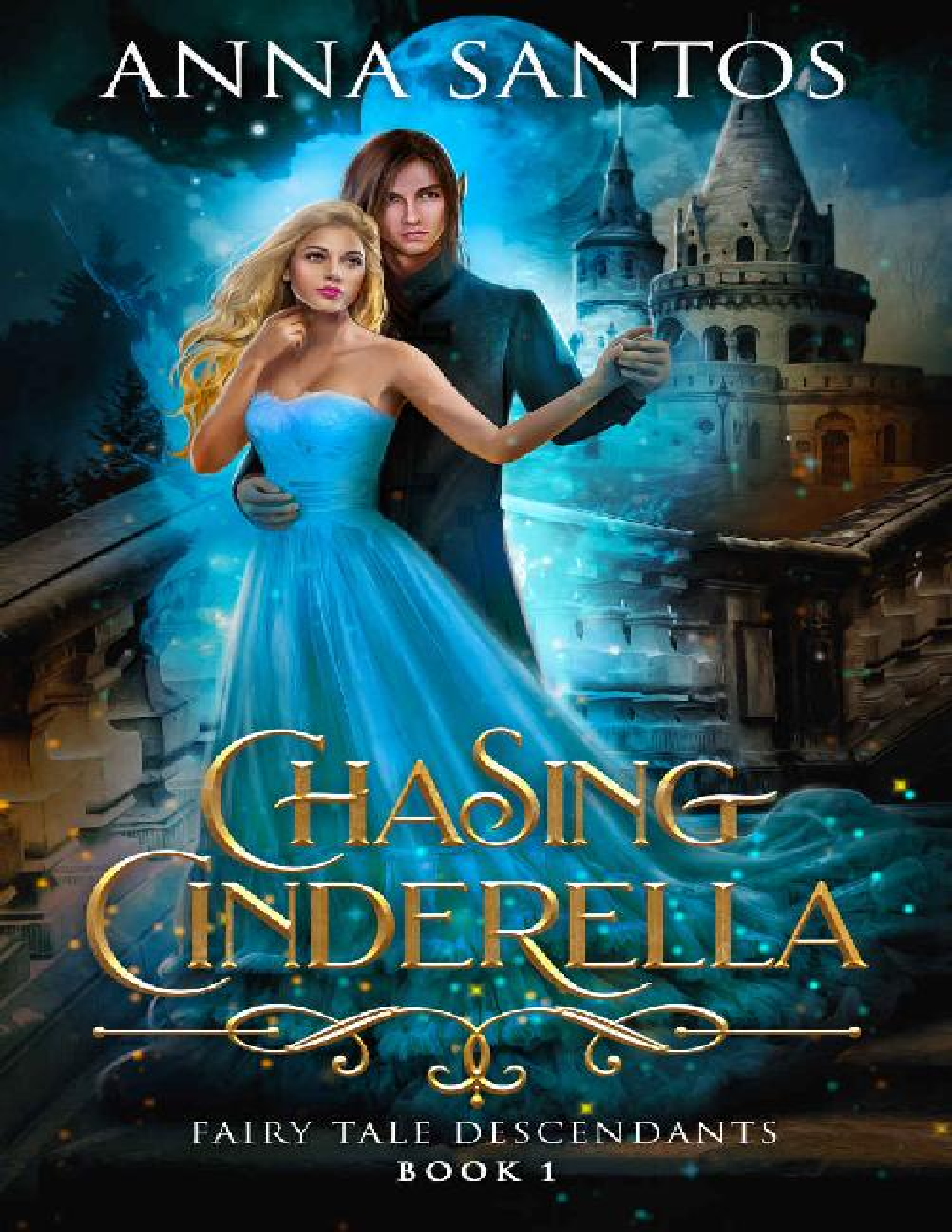
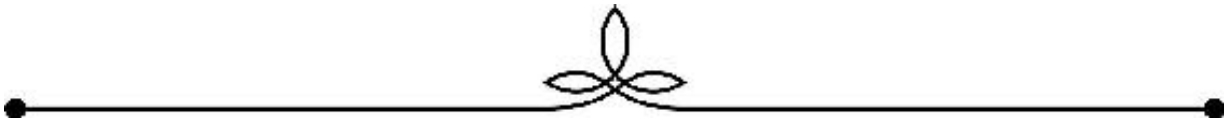
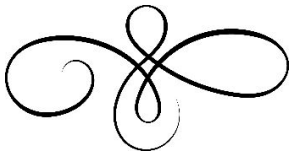

ANNA SANTOS
CHASING CINDERELLA
FAIRY TALE DESCENDANTS
BOOK 1

CHASING CINDERELLA



Fairy Tale Descendants, Book 1



ANNA SANTOS

CHASING CINDERELLA ©copyright 2018 Anna Santos

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

This is a work of fiction. Names, places, characters and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to any actual persons, living or dead, organizations, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

Warning: the unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in prison and a fine of $250,000.

Inquiries about additional permissions should be directed to:
authorannasantos@gmail.com

For an updated list of books, and to have access to my upcoming releases, check my **website**:

www.annasantosauthor.com

Or Facebook:

https://www.facebook.com/AnnaSantosAuthor

You can also sign up for **my Newsletter** to get a notification the day a new book comes out and find more about my other books and giveaways.

Cover Design by Covers by Juan

Edited by Alyssa Breck

CHASING CINDERELLA

While growing up, Odette Charming has been bullied because of her last name. It doesn’t help when her parents believe they are direct descendants from Cinderella and Prince Charming. They even have the glass slippers to prove it.

Laying low and focusing her attention on her studies has been her way to cope with everything. Until the love of her life breaks up with his eternal girlfriend and Odette believes that with a change of attitude and a makeover Carl will finally look her way.

Even with the help of her best friend, things don’t go as planned, and Odette seeks refuge in her childhood dreams and family relics. Trying on the glass slippers of her ancestor can’t hurt, right?

Not only do the slippers fit, but they give her a physical transformation and teleport her to another realm where a sad elf prince throws parties every night, hoping that his beloved will find her way to his kingdom.

Prince Edrahil has been waiting far too long for his future queen to drop on his doorstep and claim his heart. Instead, the beautiful fairy that arrives is in love with someone in her world and wants his help to conquer that person’s heart. In exchange for borrowing the magical slippers, Edrahil is willing to come to the earth realm to play matchmaker and godfather to Odette.

As their destinies drift further apart, the dark elf can only hope that Odette is happy even if that might mean his own demise.

Contents

Chapter 1
Chapter 2
Chapter 3
Chapter 4
Chapter 5
Chapter 6
Chapter 7
Chapter 8
Chapter 9
Chapter 10
Chapter 11
Chapter 12
Chapter 13
Chapter 14
Chapter 15
Chapter 16
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chapter 1

ODETTE CHARMING KNEW that Carl O'Brien was the love of her life. He was popular, handsome, a football player, and an all-around good guy. They had a few classes together, and she was certain, at the right moment, he would finally realize she existed. Outside of the fact that her last name made him laugh along with most of the class. That was just silly stuff, nothing mean really. No matter how embarrassed and hurt she felt.

It was her fault, a nerdy bookworm at New York University was not exactly unique. She was blonde and pretty but nothing like the bombshell cheerleaders he hung out with. Worse, her parents ran a business collecting and restoring rare books. One she wanted to take over one day and dedicated many hours learning all the tools of the trade. She could not be more ordinary if she tried. Minus having the most outdated weird name in modern history.

Of course, her family also had a strange belief. Her parents revealed that their surname meant she was a descendant of the Charming bloodline. The one from the Cinderella fairytale. More so, one of their rarest artifacts, a pair of glass slippers hidden deep inside the mansion with other special relics, were not just ordinary items but the ones Cinderella wore to the ball.

As a child, she thought it was fun to mention being related to a princess. But that only ended in her being teased. The real world was not exactly filled with people who truly believed in fairytales. Now an adult, she couldn't believe that her parents thought it was a good idea to tell people this crazy story.

One good thing that came of it was her best friend, Elizabeth Rosenberg. After being teased in grade school and an outcast for years to come, Beth became her new best friend. Her family were florists and owned a huge company that provided floral arrangements for parties and special occasions. But there was also a secret Beth had been smart enough not to share openly. The Rosenbergs secretly believed they were the descendants

of Sleeping Beauty and that flowers had special powers. Worse, Beth's dreams of stardom were outlandish, and her parents thought that Odette's bestie was meant for a higher destiny. Odette cringed, wondering what was happening in this city to drive the adults' delusion. But she couldn't complain about finding a best friend due to their parents' peculiar beliefs.

Beth was a lot more outgoing than Odette. Though Odette wanted to have more fun at university, she was also obsessed with her grades and studying hard. But lately, studying hard seemed as if she was wasting her life. Being the nerd didn't earn her points with the other friends in her class. On the contrary, some believed they could take advantage of her and force her to do all the work when there were involved in group projects. It only made her more reclusive and attached to her one and only friend. At least Beth didn't try to have Odette do her homework.

One thing was for sure, Odette had to reinvent herself and become someone else if she hoped to get Carl's attention.

From her favorite spot under a tree way over on the far side of the campus, she raised her nose from the book she was reading. She focused her attention on the happy girls strolling in the direction of the football field where the popular guys were practicing, and the hot girls were cheerleading and perfecting their routines.

"Hey, Charming," someone greeted from afar. It was Ken, Beth's older brother. She waved at him and wondered where her best friend was.

Jumping from behind, Beth grabbed her shoulders. "What are you thinking about?"

"You scared me. Why are you lurking in the shadows?"

"There are barely any shadows. It's a sunny day, and you're the one hiding under a tree instead of offering your skin some vitamin D."

"I'm not a plant to perform photosynthesis, I'm good here, so I don't get burned."

Beth sat down, crossed her legs next to Odette, and hummed as she gazed at the sunlight beating down on the leaves. "So pretty and quiet today."

Odette arched an eyebrow at her. “Why are you so happy?”

“Brian asked me out.”

“That’s nice. I know you have a huge crush on him.”

“He’s funny and cute. It’s about time I found myself a new boyfriend.” She laced her arm around Odette’s shoulders and pulled her against her. “And you know what else is great?”

Odette shook her head.

Beth beamed. “He has a cute friend, and we can double date. What do you say? Are you ready to leave behind the celibatarian life and find yourself a real guy to crush on?”

“I have a real guy to crush on,” Odette muttered.

“Carl… Always Carl. Who has no idea you exist and has all the cheerleaders worshipping the ground he walks on. Plus, he dates the queen bee of this college.”

“They don’t look happy together.”

“Even if they broke up, you are too shy to talk to him. How are you planning to conquer his heart? By reading poetry in the moonlight and write him beautiful love letters? Are you even sure that he knows how to read?”

Odette pushed her friend aside. “Don’t be mean. Carl is much more than a football player. I’m sure he has a kind soul and he…” She nibbled on her lip and silenced herself.

“What Carl has is great abs, strong legs, and he’s the star quarterback. He seems to be able to communicate with his own tribe, but who knows outside his group.”

“Are you being mean today? Your brother also plays football. Do you think he’s ignorant too?”

“I do, but he’s my brother so I’m probably the last person who will speak well of him.”

Odette giggled. “You are so silly. I would love to have a sibling. It’s boring being an only child.”

Beth grabbed her friend's cheeks. "Oh, the Charming curse. Did you know you are the first female to be born into the Charming bloodline in three centuries?"

"Yes, my ancestors from my father's side seem to have been all males." Odette pushed her hands away because she was hurting her cheeks. "Stop pinching my cheeks."

"You are so cute, I can't help it."

"Beth, you are a weird friend."

Beth giggled and opened her arms. Breathing deeply, she asked, "Being an only child must put a lot of responsibility on your shoulders. I guess that's why you study so hard."

"I'll eventually inherit my family's business. But I also enjoy books, so it's fine."

Her best friend exhaled impatiently. "Do you want to have fun or not? Can I tell Brian to bring his friend?"

"I have to study." She raised her hand before Beth could protest. "Plus, my heart only has a special place for Carl, no one else."

Puckering her lips, Beth muttered, "You are boring. You'll die a virgin like that."

"I'm still young. I have plenty of time to…" She waved her hand as if it was the only thing she needed for Beth to know how to finish the sentence.

"To have sex? You are twenty-one. It's not like guys wait around to have sex with the person they are going to marry, so you don't need to be such a prude." She moved closer. "Or do you think that Chastity is up to her name?" Giggling, she patted the dirt with her open hands and fell back. "I can't even breathe with my own wittiness."

"Chastity is popular and pretty. I'm not like her. She can do whatever she wants. It's her life. It's also not her fault that I'm in love with her boyfriend."

Beth sneered. "You are too nice. She has always been cruel to you, and you still want to give her the other cheek. Be happy you have me to defend

you or your life would be pretty boring."

"You are a good friend, and I know I'm lucky to have you."

Folding her hands over her chest, Beth looked at her friend. "Do you want to go to my place? Mom is making us oven baked pork chops with potatoes tonight, and I know it's your favorite. Your parents are still away, right?"

Odette nodded.

"Then just join us for a family dinner."

"Okay."

"And we can sleep together so I can spend the night talking about Brian and how handsome he is. I saw him shirtless the other day in the field while he was practicing. He's so fit and …"

Odette put her hand over Beth's mouth to quiet her down. "Just be quiet and stop talking about abs. I need to read this chapter for tomorrow."

She pushed her hand away. "I thought you'd read it already."

"I'm reading it one more time for tomorrow's quiz."

***

The next morning, Odette couldn't stop thinking about what she could do to become someone different. Someone more like her best friend. Beth was right. She couldn't hide her with her books and forget about having a social life. Why couldn't she be more like Beth and keep her nose out of a book? Still, that would be like trying to teach a fish how to breathe on land. A task that was damned near impossible and likely deadly.

Looking at the time, she realized her free period was over and hurried to class. A girl pointed at her vintage dress and laughed. Hardly any girl on campus wore a dress unless it was cut short and Odette's was ankle length. Between that and her old-fashioned framed glasses, it was no wonder why hardly anyone of the opposite sex noticed her.

In class, she saw Beth wave at her from the back. Her friend didn't take this course.

"What are you doing here?" Odette sat beside her. "You better not be planning to cause trouble. We have a test coming up, and I plan to be focused on my notes."

Beth rolled her green eyes. "I'm here to talk to you. But I had to wait for you to arrive. What happened?"

"I lost track of time."

"That sounds like something you'd do if you were reading a new book. Are you? Did you find another breathtaking romance with a dashing prince on his white horse?"

Odette looked at her sideways. "You like to read too. Stop making fun of me."

Beth grinned. "I'm just teasing you."

"Why are you here?"

"I have something to tell you." She leaned in close and whispered in her ear. "Guess who is single again?"

Odette shrugged.

"The man of your dreams."

Odette's mouth opened wide.

Beth added, "You got your wish granted."

"I never wished for that."

"Liar." She smiled mischievously. "Queen bee is out of your way, and if you play your cards right, maybe you'll be his next girlfriend instead of his usual type."

"Me? Why would he even give me a second glance? We know his type."

"What's his type?"

"Sexy and legs for days."

“You’d be sexy if you changed your clothes and put on some makeup. You are also his type since he likes blondes.”

Odette looked at her outfit and then at her hair. “Do you think I could be his type with a makeover?”

Beth nodded with a smile that showed her teeth.

Leaning closer, Odette whispered, “There’s no question that Carl O’Brien loves beautiful girls, and his former cheerleading girlfriend, Chastity, was a knockout. Still, as a member of the NYU football team and a top player, he’ll be on the radar of every available girl.”

“Not on my radar,” Beth protested.

“If I was gorgeous and confident like you, maybe I would stand a chance. But I can’t even say good morning to him without choking.”

“You are smart and beautiful. These things count, and you need to be more open. Plus, get a new wardrobe, so you don’t look like my great-grandmother,” Beth retorted.

Leave it to a best friend to really hit the nail on the head. A guy as handsome and cool as Carl would never want a girl like her. Still, it wasn’t a crime to try, right? At least for Beth’s sake, so it didn’t look like the brunette snuck into class for nothing.

Odette felt courageous for the first time. “I guess I might have a shot.”

“Perfect, in three weeks Carl will be at the Moonlight Ball. I think I can get an extra invite so you can come. I’ll think about a way to introduce you to him. My brother plays football too, I can ask him to help us. If you get a chance to talk to you and see how nice you are …” Beth bounced in her seat.

“Only you would believe in something like that, Beth,” Odette mumbled, her heart filled with love for her bestie.

Beth showed her four fingers. “You have four weeks to get Carl to like you and take you as his date to the grand ball.”

“That’s an insane goal. I don’t …”

“Don’t even dare to chicken out,” Beth warned with squinted eyes.

“I really need a makeover,” she mumbled instead.

“Great! This is truly the kick in the pants you need to try a new look. Even if you fail to seduce Carl, at least you will get out of your comfort zone and try new things. Maybe you’ll find true love in the process.”

“You are more romantic than I am, do you know that?”

“Don’t be silly.”

“Do you know what this means?” Odette asked with widened eyes.

Frowning, Beth probed, “What?”

Odette leaned forward. “We both need to find the perfect dress for the ball.”

Beth squealed, ignoring the looks from the other students

Chapter 2

ODETTE WAS DETERMINED to find the perfect dress. If she was going to have a shot in hell with Carl at the ball, looks mattered. Anyone going would be dressed to impress. Arriving in anything other than a mind-blowing outfit meant disaster. He dated the most beautiful and sophisticated girls in school. No matter their attitudes, the girls he was with knew how to act. In order to get his attention, she needed to be just as engaging, if not better.

With her parents away on business, at least she could focus on plans to woo Carl. They would have told her to find a boy who was into the person she was right now. Not to change and to stay their nerdy daughter. Advice just as terrible as their belief in fantasy bloodlines. The real world had no time to pretend. She either rose to the occasion or failed. It was terrifying enough figuring out a way to get Carl away from his posse. Beth was working on a solution, but she doubted that even her best friend's brother would risk social suicide for them.

Beth was glad to go shopping for the perfect dress for the ball. Both females had gone to multiple stores hunting for their dream gown. Yet it seemed that no matter what Odette tried, no outfit could make her feel confident or beautiful. Beth and the employees tried to sway her harsh judgment. Everything just looked dowdy when her mind went to Carl. The dress would seem perfect on the rack but when she tried it on, something just didn't feel right. Shoes were even worse. Three days went by, and she was certain that this ball was a huge mistake.

Nevertheless, Beth wouldn't allow her to quit. If the dress had to wait, her best friend could at least give the perfect makeover. Odette refused anything being done to her hair outside of a professional blowout. Her long, blonde hair might be old fashioned, but it was special to her, and she cringed when the hairstylist cut off the split ends. Then there was a cute ensemble Beth roped her into buying. A polka dot handkerchief top and a blue pleated skirt that barely passed her knees. She insisted on wearing her pink flats despite protests. Finally, Beth did her makeup, and it was over.

Time to call in the favor that would have Carl meeting face to face with her new self.

“What if I mess this up?” Odette followed Beth to the football field.

The team was having weekend practice, and it would be the perfect time to show up when most of her fellow schoolmates were off enjoying the weekend.

“Stop being such a worry wart. Carl will have to be blind and dumb not to notice you. I bet you’ll be beating off the guys with a stick once they see you.” Beth giggled.

What Beth thought was hilarious was Odette’s worst nightmare. She wanted Carl to notice her, not a bunch of random, horny jocks. Maybe her best friend liked to play the field until a special someone came along, but she was not one for the crazy dating scene. If anyone besides her target asked for a date, she would probably flee the country and never return.

Taking deep breaths, she followed Beth’s lead to the guy they had to talk to first.

“Hey, brother of mine,” Beth cooed at a muscular brunette splashing himself under the broiling heat. “The team’s working hard as usual. Wish you did chores this good, Ken.”

“Har, har, very funny.” Ken rolled his eyes and then focused his attention on Odette. “Who’s that with you? I thought you were bringing along that sad bookworm that always trails behind you everywhere.”

Odette’s face went a deep shade of red.

Was that really how Ken saw her? He had always been nice though they rarely talked outside of introductions. Maybe this was a crazy idea. If Beth’s jock brother didn’t see her as a good prospect, what chance did she have with Carl?

Beth slapped the side of her brother’s head. Looking absolutely livid and earning her keep as a bestie. “Who else would I bring with me? Stop thinking with your third leg and have some manners.”

Ken himself went crimson. After stuttering an apology, he turned and ran off.

So much for introducing them to Carl. The only way things could get worse was a fainting spell or a rainstorm.

“Forget him we can do this ourselves.” Beth grabbed her hand, stomping across the field.

There was not a single doubt in the confident girl’s stride as she shoved aside men five times her size. In any other situation this would seem heroic, but now it screamed insanity.

Odette was too shocked to resist but still felt her heart thumping in her chest. What if Carl thought she was some crazy stalker and dashed off like Ken? Sure that wasn’t really her fault, but that would be mortifying. Talk about being a social pariah straight through graduation. She had to stop this and go home before things got any worse. Maybe she would find the courage to ask someone else in a decade.

“Beth, we should go.”

“Nonsense, we don’t need a man to help us.” Beth ignored her pleas. “Hey, guys! Looks like you’re ready to win the next game. You know me because of my brother, but have you met Odette?” The brunette pushed Odette forward as if a human sacrifice to the five, beefy guys.

Odette bit her lip. “Um. Hi! You guys really do a great job. Hey, Carl.” She found the courage to look into the eyes of the raven-haired male hanging out in the back.

Carl O’Brien looked up when his name was called. He had creamy tanned skin with a wavy head of dark hair and brown eyes. Just over six feet tall, the football player easily towered over her. There was no doubt he could get any girl with just a wink and a grin.

He moved closer. “Hey. Do I know you from class? Beth usually hangs out with that other homely chick, Charming.”

Odette froze at the term. Homely? Was that how he truly saw her? She knew her old self was no big beauty, but that word stung. Perhaps changing herself this much was a mistake. If Carl was going to fall for her, it had to be real. She had no intention on pretending forever that these were the kind of clothes she liked to wear.

Faking a smile, she said, “Beth hangs out with really nice people.”

“Sure, but some of them are kind of ugly,” another player joked.

Soon the guys were laughing and pushing at each other.

Odette’s heart sank to her feet. The team just saw her as another random, pretty face. Which was probably for the best. Hopefully, things couldn’t get any worse.

“I think I left something in the car. Right, my sunglasses.” She came up with the perfect getaway.

Without her glasses, she could only see a few feet ahead clearly. The contacts they ordered didn’t arrive in time, so she risked going without. Now she just wanted to leave before anything more disastrous happened. Her stomach was in knots.

Grabbing her friend’s arm, Odette pleaded her with her eyes. “Come, Beth, let’s go.”

“Odette look out!” her friend screamed too late.

The mascot had been running forward with a tray of energy drinks, but the blonde completely missed seeing him. The pair crashed into each other and fell to the ground. It was a huge scene with people from all over running forward. A few started pulling out their camera phones to take pictures.

“Are you okay?” Beth pushed forward as Odette struggled to her feet.

“Charming, are you hurt?” Ken dashed forward and pulled her up. “Guess you really need those glasses,” he noted giving her a water bottle and towel to help clean up.

“Charming?” a random person in the crowd asked.

“Isn’t that the toady looking girl in class wearing old hand-me-downs?”

“Nah, she’s the blonde chick dressed like she lives in a convent.”

“Is that her hot twin sister?”

“I am so posting this on Instagram!”

The voices swirled around, filling Odette with dread.

Instead of her new look bringing in better opportunities, now she was going to be the campus laughingstock. Hell, she might even make the university's gossip journal since people were already uploading pictures on social media. The day had taken such a turn for the worse that she had whiplash. Or maybe that was from crashing into the innocent mascot and soaking them both?

"You idiot!" Beth kicked her brother. "You ruined everything. I'll never forgive you."

"What did I do? Why wasn't she wearing her glasses?" Ken countered.

Odette quickly cleaned up as best as she could.

"Take me home, Beth. Just forget about this whole thing. It was a dumb idea."

The sooner she got home the sooner she could curl up into a ball and cry for all of eternity. This was what she deserved for messing with the status quo.

"Not so charming now," a group of cheerleaders taunted as she and Beth walked briskly off the field.

Chapter 3

ODETTE SAT ON the sofa with ice-cream, listening to her favorite playlist. Beth had called her a million times, but she hadn't answered. The last thing she needed right now was a pep talk. Sometimes it was best to wallow in your own misery for a while. Especially when she created this by trying to be someone she was not. The hot cheerleaders got the jocks in college. Even Beth had a shot as a beautiful woman with a shining personality. Like Carl said, Odette was 'homely.' Dressing like she was from a different time period and being a real weirdo.

Just slapping on some makeup and dressing up was not going to change public perception. Worse, there were pictures online for which she would be made fun of forever. If only Ken had not said her last name. But he was just worried, and the poor mascot was just an unwilling victim. Hopefully, people were not making fun of him online as well. A tornado would have been a better option than what went down on the field. At least she would be dead and not see all the jokes and uploads involving her accident.

She pulled out her phone and went on social media. It was stupid, but the taunts called her like a moth to the flame. There were even memes suggesting she was a Cinderella story in reverse. A picture of her as she usually dressed versus the new look that ended up with her looking like a wet hen.

All the comments just made her want to leave the country. How was she supposed to go back to class and pretend things were normal? Plus, there was no way that Carl would want to date her now. Being the campus joke did not score sexy points.

With a sigh, she decided to go about organizing some of the artifacts. Her parents valued them above most things. Except her and the special artifacts kept out of sight. Which included the supposed magical slippers.

Someone in her family line had a vivid imagination.

Right now, she wished they were Dorothy's ruby slippers so she could escape to another world.

Great, now this fairytale nonsense was starting to get into her head as well.

She cleaned and focused on not thinking about the incident. There was a maid who cleaned up accessible areas monthly. But sometimes the cases were locked and that meant dust gathered until her parents unlocked it. Which gave her the extra work since they left her with access to everything. It was nice having the house to herself, but a part of her wondered if maybe Mr. and Mrs. Charming would have some good advice about the situation. Either way, there was no doubt that things had changed enough for a lifetime.

Odette decided to save the most precious items for last. Her parents kept the glass slippers and other priceless relics in a secret room. Claiming it would be dangerous if someone stole them.

She rolled her eyes at the idea, but there was a super expensive security system just for that door. No one started giving her the codes until she turned fifteen. Recalling the times her parents took her inside as a child brought a nostalgic smile.

Inside the secret room, she immediately noticed the glass slippers on the center display. There was a glow that seemed to call to her. The pair was just as beautiful and mystifying as when she last saw them. No matter her skepticism, there was no doubt these slippers were priceless and beautiful.

She cleaned all the other items first, trying to ignore the silly legend her parents had told her. These were just normal shoes that were passed down as family heirlooms. It was preposterous to believe anything else in this world.

But would it really hurt to pretend just for a little while?

Her life was pretty crappy right now. Perhaps a little magic, even imaginary, would lift her spirits. Shoes that could turn a girl into the perfect princess was just what she needed. Best case scenario, she would have the dress and look of a lifetime. Worst, she could just strut about and imagine it was all real. More than anything, she needed a new plan in order to capture the heart of her own prince. Carl played football, but if he were discovered to be long lost royalty, she wouldn’t be surprised.

Her hands shook as she picked up the slippers carefully. They looked smaller up closely. A sinking feeling that they might not fit started to set in.

However, once she put a slipper on her foot, it fit like a glove. Nothing changed, but she took a breath and slipped on the next. Whether she remained her plain self was up to fate.

***

Odette jumped to her feet as a burst of light from golden dust appeared around her. Fearing she'd lost her mind, it became clear the opposite was happening. A magical transformation had occurred. Looking down, she noticed that she wore a jaw-dropping, periwinkle blue gown with jeweled gloves. A look in the mirror showed that her skin glowed with flawless makeup and her blonde hair was in a beautiful updo with a crown. She was almost in tears at how beautiful she looked.

Then she noticed her ears were pointy and the dress, though beautiful, looked from another century. Lovely as it was to wear in the mansion, she couldn't go to the ball like this unless it was to wear as a costume.

With a sigh, she got ready to remove the slippers until something shining on the mirror made her stop. Reflected on the surface of the mirror stood a lavish castle which shone like the sun in the darkness surrounding it.

Just how much magic did these slippers have in the real world?

Before she could fully absorb what was being shown, the castle door opened and an invisible force pulled at Odette. The next second, she was sucked in through the glass.

Chapter 4

ODETTE WAS TRAPPED in a swirl of magical dust as she was pulled into another dimension. She had no idea what to do or how to fight this sudden change. What kind of world was she going to land in? Was this castle ruled by a kindly royal family or an evil one ready to execute trespassers? Was she having a weird dream?

Nevertheless, the trip filled her both with curiosity and dread. As if her life needed any more craziness after everything else so far. This meant that her family had been right all along. There was magic in their lineage, and the shoes were not just special but a gateway to another world. It was possible that not even her parents knew of this fact. They probably wouldn't believe it if she told them. Plus, messing with the shoes was strictly forbidden. She had gone way over the line by putting them on. There would be nothing magical about the lengthy grounding and lectures she would receive if they found out. This was a priceless family relic, not a pair of sandals to be worn randomly.

Upon reaching her destination, the ground started to spin less as she landed. Her feet stood on exquisite marble tiled floors. Soon, a lavish ballroom became clear, and everything looked perfect for royalty.

As she looked around with widened eyes and a gaping mouth, Odette realized that there were other people in the room. Beautifully dressed individuals littered the area wearing clothes from the same era her dress looked to be from.

These shoes had dropped her into a fancy party—uninvited. Her heart throbbed, and her ears hurt with the pressure created by her embarrassment and fear. What was she going to do if these individuals weren't friendly? She wasn't in her world anymore. Would they even understand her language?

Curious eyes noticed her arrival and whispers rose and echoed in the ballroom. Lifting her dress, Odette stepped carefully and tried to find a place to hide. But as the crowd opened their way for her to pass, her gaze

stopped upon seeing someone sitting on a throne. Not just someone, a handsome, young male with pointy ears, wearing a crown and royal attire. The fact that he was seated on a throne revealed his royal lineage. Her breathing stopped, and she held her skirt tighter as her tongue felt like sandpaper.

The young man didn't seem to notice her right away. In fact, he appeared glum and not at all interested in the festivities. As the silence became more overbearing, the elf raised his eyes from the floor and aimed them directly at Odette.

Odette sucked in a breath and felt the floor spinning under her feet. Her head became light, and the skirt of her dress slipped from her weak hands. Her body felt as if a wave of heat crashed against it when the elf rose from his throne and sauntered his imposing figure in her direction. Was he even real? His attire was beyond beautiful. Exquisite and delicate as if made of strings of silver and diamonds.

"You've come," he mumbled when he stopped in front of her.

Tilting her head to the right, she narrowed her eyes and tried to decode his words. He was speaking her language. How could that be?"

"Do you speak English?"

"I speak all the languages in the seven kingdoms," the young elf said.

"Do you know where I am?" she dared to ask, peeking around her to see what the others were doing. The majority of the elves were bowing respectfully and had their eyes on the marble floor. Odette looked at the prince who now grinned. "Are you a king?"

"Not yet. My name is Edrahil, prince of the dark elves and future ruler of The Kingdom of Elfihem."

Placing his arm against his chest, he bowed to her. Odette curtsied at him with widened eyes.

"Orchestra start playing immediately. Our guest of honor has arrived," the prince spoke in a happy voice. "Everybody dance and have fun."

It was with surprised eyes that Odette followed the sudden change in the ballroom as the music started to play and the guests obeyed their

prince’s orders. A bustle of dancing and activity created the perfect scene of what a ball should be. Her eyes became fascinated by the flowing gowns on the beautiful elf women and the graceful movements of the couples.

Bright lights turned on and filled the ambience with joy as the guests chatted and the servants served beverages and small plates with cookies in the shape of exotic flowers.

It was then she realized that the prince was still beside her and waited for her to acknowledge his presence.

Bowing, she mumbled, “Your palace is beautiful. I’m sorry for arriving unexpectedly and crashing your party. If you tell me how I can leave, I’ll let you enjoy your time with your subjects.”

He leaned down with a grin. “You still haven’t told me your name, beautiful fairy.”

Odette blushed. “I’m not a fairy.”

“Are you sure?” His smile made her heart flutter. “You look just like a fairy princess.”

She leaned closer and spoke softly. “I’m actually human and completely normal. No royal title either.”

“Oh. Is that so?”

Odette nodded.

“What is your name then?”

“Odette.”

“It’s a beautiful name.” He offered her his hand. “You are my guest here. No need to leave. Please join me for a dance.”

“A dance.” She looked at the couples swirling around as if they had done that all their lives. “I have no idea how to dance like that. I’m also clumsy, and I’ll step on your feet. You don’t want to dance with me.”

“Don’t people dance where you come from?”

“Your music sounds similar to ours,” Odette said, looking at the orchestra with violins and even a piano. “But waltzes are out of fashion, and I haven’t learned how to dance them.”

“Out of fashion? What a peculiar world you come from.”

“Your Highness, I don’t mean to offend you but, but am I really in another world?”

He took her hand and guided her to the balcony where they could talk more privately.

Upon arriving there, she opened her mouth in awe with the lovely grounds where the castle was and the splendid night with two moons and bright stars.

“This doesn’t look like anything in my world. Even the sky is different,” she gasped. “The air is so fragrant, and I’ve never seen two moons before.”

When she looked back, the prince was staring at her with curious eyes.

She averted her gaze. “I’m so sorry. You asked me a question, and I haven’t replied yet. I’m from earth.” Looking down at her feet, she lifted the skirt. “I put these on. They are a family heirloom. Once they fit, the magic in them made me look like this and brought me here. I’m not even sure if I’m not dreaming and all this isn’t a product of my vivid imagination.”

“Though I’m flattered that you consider me a fantasy, this is real. My kingdom, my subjects, my palace, all is real. This is the Fae world, one of the seven realms. Earth is also a realm. Do you understand the concept of realms?”

“Yes. My favorite stories are fantasy, so I understand it well.”

“Stories.” He arched an eyebrow.

“Elves and mythical creatures are considered products of our imagination and not real. That’s why I’m having a hard time believing that … this exists, and I’m in another world, under a new sky.” Odette looked at the stars. “The constellations look different. I wonder if this is a new universe or just another part of the galaxy. The concept of multiverses have been explored before, but I never thought I would be visiting another … realm.” Looking at him, she smiled timidly. “I’m sorry for babbling. You must find my excitement rather childish.”

“On the contrary, I find your questions and assumptions extremely intelligent.”

“I’m a bit of a bookworm. People don’t find that interesting where I come from. At least not outside my family. My parents are amazing and important scholars in their field of knowledge. They collect rare books and restore them.” She closed her mouth and folded her hands. “I’m babbling again. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry. I like intelligent women that can entertain me in a conversation.” He bowed. “I’m glad you aren’t just another pretty face.”

Fluttering her eyelids, she gulped at his compliment. “I’m not that pretty.” She looked down at her fancy dress. “Without these clothes and magical transformation, I’m just plain boring and normal.”

The prince asked, “Do you care to dance?”

Looking behind him, she bit her lip and watched how everybody seemed to be having fun. “Dancing seems something shallow to do since I have no idea how to go back home. Plus, I would just be embarrassing myself.”

“It appears that you have no idea why you are here.”

“I’m here because I put these on and they brought me here. But I have no idea why and how to go back.”

“Let’s make a deal,” the prince proposed. “If you accept my dance request and engage in light conversation, once the party is over, I promise that I’ll find a way to take you home. After all, this is a magical realm, and I have the power to summon the most powerful magic wielders that can fix your problem and return you to earth.”

Odette gasped with surprise. “Would you do that for me?”

“Anything to make you happy, little fairy.”

“Prince, I’m not a fairy. These are fake,” she explained, touching her pointy ears.

He grinned. “You are fascinating, little one.” He showed her his hand. “Now, our dance.”

Placing her hand on his sent sparkles down her body and her heart throbbed. As she followed the prince to the dance floor, she realized that no one had ever found her fascinating before. Boring, yes. Quirky, that too. But not fascinating. Beautiful, her parents and close friends were kind enough to boost her ego. Still, she knew that the most important thing wasn't someone's external beauty but their inside beauty.

***

The prince led her into a waltz. "Just feel the music and relax. I'll guide you."

His words comforted her and, despite her fears, Odette danced as if she had done it all her life. Not a single dance was foreign to her feet. It seemed that the slippers had more magic to fascinate her since they seemed to turn her into someone who could win first place in a dancing talent show.

When the dancing finally stopped, she felt giddy and lightheaded. She accepted a drink offered by the prince. Hoping that might help calm her nerves. Then he led her back to the balcony, and they descended to the garden for a night stroll.

"Your garden is truly beautiful. I've never seen so many lovely and incandescent flowers in my life, and my best friend's family owns a floriculture company. I often help them. Their flowers, though beautiful, are pale in comparison with these ones that glow in the night and smell better than any perfume on earth."

The prince spoke beside her. "These flowers come to life at night and sleep during the day. Though I'm afraid that they look pale compared to the Summer Fae Court. Those have vibrant colors and bring joy to anyone who sees them."

"I find these captivating, and they also bring me joy. There's nothing wrong with being different from the other flowers. It makes them even more special. Your night flowers are exquisite Oh!" Odette covered her mouth in surprise when the flowers around them cast tiny, shiny silver particles into the atmosphere and fell down on them like magical fairy dust.

“It seems that you made my flowers happy,” the prince said.

“So beautiful.” She swirled around and giggled as the dust fell on her and tickled her skin. “This is the most beautiful place I’ve ever been.”

“Be careful,” the prince warned when she became dizzy and bumped into him. He secured her by her shoulders and gazed into her eyes.

“See, I’m clumsy. Even with magic slippers I manage to almost trip over you and fall to the floor.”

“It’s my pleasure to catch you before you fall.”

Is he flirting with me? Am I flirting with him? That sounded so sexy!

Stepping back, she bowed slightly. “I really appreciate your hospitality but …”

Words got stuck in her throat when the strike of a bell sounded. She looked around, trying to understand where the sound came from. Were there bells somewhere?

“What’s wrong?” the prince asked with a worried expression.

“Did you hear it too?”

Another stroke and her body spasmed with pain.

“Heard what?”

“The stroke of the bell.”

The prince looked at the sky. “It’s midnight.”

Another ache made her stumble back. She looked at her feet, and the shoes were glowing. “I need to go back home before midnight.”

“Home? The slippers.” He pointed at the floor. “Their magic ends at midnight.”

With another stroke of midnight, she held on to her heart that hurt. “I need to go. I’m so sorry. I don’t know what will happen but my body feels strange and my feet want to …” She didn’t finish her sentence because the slippers had a mind of their own and made her feet move.

Grabbing the skirt of her dress, she stopped fighting the urge to run and let the magic lead her.

“Odette. Beautiful fairy,” the prince called, running after her.

“I am sorry, Prince Edrahil. You have been so kind, but I need to leave. Perhaps I’ll get a chance to meet with you again. You have a wonderful kingdom, and I had fun dancing with you.”

“Remove the slippers. There is still a lot we need to talk about.”

She never ran this fast in her life. Even if she wanted to stop, she couldn’t. The prince seemed so sad as he ran beside her. Still, her home wasn’t there and she couldn’t lose the chance of returning back to earth.

“I have to get back home, prince.”

“But this can be your home. I know it might be new and strange but don’t go yet. You need to know that you are extremely special, Odette. If you stay, I can tell you more and help you understand your true legacy. Just give me a chance.”

Odette felt terrible for leaving the prince in a lurch. He seemed like a nice guy who just wanted to get to know her better. But home was waiting with those who truly knew her. Plus, this magical realm had started to hurt. It was not her fault that midnight brought pounding pain and feelings of panic. The saying ‘magic has a price’ was getting too real. If she missed the window of leaving, there was no telling what kind of fate she would meet.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t risk it. Thank you for your kindness, and I will try to return and see more of the kingdom.”

She let the slippers take full control and covered her ears to ignore everything that the prince had to say. As long as there was a risk of getting stuck, she had to focus on leaving.

Guests stared at her as she ran past. No doubt wondering why she was in such a hurry. So, she might have also started bad rumors on the prince too. Talk about a load of bad luck. It was probably for the best that she had to go. Whatever bad mojo she was stuck with, this realm didn’t deserve a taste of it at all.

Outside the doors, she saw a portal waiting and ran straight in. If she ended up anywhere but home, she was sunk.

When she opened her squinted eyes, she understood that she was standing in front of the mirror that had dragged her inside and taken her to the Elves' realm. Not just that, she was back to her plain self with her regular clothes and looks. While there was a hint of disappointment, she was glad to be home. After all, she still had friends and family who would miss her if she disappeared. Her parents definitely didn't deserve to return to reports of her missing.

In the end, running off to a magical realm was just a silly fantasy she couldn't do.

As she put the slippers on their place and strolled to her bedroom, her mind thought about everything she had seen and experienced. Prince Edrahil was extremely handsome and kind. His kingdom was obviously flourishing. The castle alone looked priceless and the grounds well kept by the staff. He had been a perfect gentleman, and she had just abandoned him. But with the increasing pain and wish to return home to Earth, it just couldn't be avoided. Unless he came too, but that was just silly thinking.

She was home in the real world. No matter how mystical the fae realm was, it couldn't replace earth and all those she cared about. Besides, the man she loved was here. Not off in an elf kingdom sulking on a throne and bored with his royal existence.

At least, she hoped not.

Chapter 5

BACK AT UNIVERSITY, Odette did her best to stay off the radar. Which wasn't easy with those photos floating online. As she feared, they were everywhere and what everybody wanted to talk about. She often waited for the professor to arrive before taking a seat up front to avoid conversations.

Ironic that now she was a laughing stock, everybody wanted to have a chat. This world was a place that truly knew how to kick someone when they were down. Finding the strength to get back up and face the day with a fake smile was the best she could do.

Still, she was determined to find a way to go to the ball. Carl was the guy of her dreams, and perhaps there was still a chance. If an elf prince could find her interesting, why not a regular mortal? Granted, Carl had dazzling looks and a great future ahead of him in football. There had to be a way to get back on the right side of history. Too bad that at the present moment, she was better off as the unknown wallflower she was before than the laughing stock of the college. No way a guy as popular as him was going to date a joke. As of now, he was better off attending the event dateless than having her on his arm.

Plus, the magical slippers were of no help. She thought the magic would obey her, but it had a mind of its own. A few extra tries had her still wearing beautiful outdated clothes. She had to remove them before teleporting to another realm. The slippers would be of no help for the Moonlight Ball. Unless she planned to go to a renaissance fair, the only result would be getting made fun of.

Her ancestry might be unique but what use was it if it couldn't help in the current reality of things? It was old magic that needed to be upgraded, no doubt.

A thought kept returning to her. Why had the descendants of Cinderella not all stayed in that beautiful kingdom? How come the slippers were back on Earth instead of the magical realm where it was created? Entering that

other realm only left her with more questions than answers. As if life wasn't stressful enough already.

Odette also had to face Beth. After avoiding her friend all weekend, there was no question the usually bubbly girl would be upset. She just needed space to clear her head. The embarrassment was accidental, but there was still a twinge of anger against her friend. The makeover had been a disaster and no question, this Charming girl was not ready. Ken even ran up to apologize, and she had to nicely tell him everything was fine and dash off. It would take more than a few rushed words to undo the damage to her fragile reputation.

"Beth, I didn't see you for any of the morning classes." Odette saw her friend putting up fliers.

It was a relief seeing the girl she had been searching for. At first, she had worried that her bestie had decided to skip classes and avoid seeing her altogether.

Beth, however, didn't answer and just kept putting up more fliers. They were promoting the ball and encouraging everyone to drop by and show support. The grinning king and queen from last year made Odette's belly do flip-flops. Was there any chance that could be her and Carl? If they won, she had no doubt that he would start to take an interest in her completely.

"Did I do something wrong? Oh, right, not answering your calls. I swear that it was not my plan to shut you out. The stress of this whole weekend just had me on edge. You understand that, right? We really had a bad go of it." Odette rambled as she followed Beth down the corridor. "If you want, we can go look at more dresses. I'm certain if we search hard enough I will find the perfect dress to woo Carl."

"Good luck with that," Beth said, deadpan, putting up the final poster. "Don't you have a class to get to? I'm pretty sure this isn't your free period, bookworm."

Odette felt slapped in the face. Where was this attitude coming from? She and Beth had had arguments before but never had the brushoff been so cold and bitingly sarcastic. "Did I say something to offend you? I'm really sorry if I did, Beth, as my best friend …"

“Am I your best friend? Because I’m not sure that I am. Not after this weekend.” Beth turned on her with eyes blazing. “I was there during that disaster too. People made fun of me as well, and when I needed you to be there for me, you went AWOL. I would never abandon you like that. Worse, when I stopped by the house, you refused to let me in. Ignoring my calls is one thing but to treat me like an inconvenience went way too far. Just leave me alone.”

Odette could barely hide her horror. While she was on a life-altering adventure, Beth had been trying to reach her?

There was no way she could tell her friend about the magical realm now. The angry young woman would probably laugh then cut off all ties permanently.

“I swear I didn’t know you were there. Maybe I had in earbuds or the doorbell wasn’t working.”

“The doorbell works just fine,” Beth hissed. “But you also think this is all about you. I have a reputation too and our idea to get Carl to fall for you clearly didn’t work. All you do is talk about how the incident shamed you, I was there and got dragged into it as well.”

“I am sorry if you feel that I abandoned you, I was not trying to do that,” Odette apologized.

“Save it, I got excused from my current class, and I’m going to use my break to relax. Just leave me alone, Odette. I’m not ready to forgive you right now, just go.” Beth walked off in the opposite direction without looking back. Her silver stilettos clicking against the tile.

Odette wiped away tears that started to form. If Beth was willing to walk away without breaking down, then so could she. Until things were sorted out, it was best to give her friend some space.

Deciding to skip her class, she headed to the cafeteria for an early lunch.

***

Odette was about to leave when someone came to her table. If her heartbeat could be heard, it was going a million miles per minute. She had to be dreaming. Why else would this guy be here to talk to a girl like her? The popular people mainly ignored her unless she was a target for bullying. Which was precisely what was happening online and out in the real world.

“Carl, what are you doing here?” she asked. “Did you get turned around somehow?”

Carl laughed and sat across from her. “I just wanted to say that I’m sorry about last weekend. It’s never good to make fun of people at this level. Online, offline, it sucks.”

It was so surreal having him here stating that bullying was wrong and feeling bad about her hurt feelings. The love of her life was inches away defending her honor without any reward. This was why she wanted to be with him. He was such a lovely young man, ready to help others in need. “Thank you. Ken also apologized, and I think he really felt bad.”

“Yeah, that was awkward. You looked nice over the weekend,” Carl added.

She blushed.

Straightening her vintage, baby doll dress, she wondered if exchanging her glasses for the contacts would be a good idea now. If Carl noticed her looks before, maybe that would help.

“Thanks, but I’m not sure if that look was me. The whole thing kind of put Beth and me on the outs.”

It was still hard knowing that her best friend was so mad right now.

“Well, whatever you decide, I hope that you’ll be okay,” Carl said. “Hey, are you going to the Moonlight Ball? Not sure if it’s the kind of event you’d go to but …”

“Yes, I plan to be there. It’s nice to know that you’re going too,” Odette cut him off.

“Hey, weirdo!” a voice cut in and she turned to see a group of cackling cheerleaders passing by. “You shouldn’t be here. You might catch her outcast flu, Carl. We have a game coming up, remember?”

Carl suddenly looked uncomfortable. He tried to give a small smile, but the moment had been broken.

Soon, he was on his feet confirming the change in the situation. “I have to get to class, and there’s extra practice later. It was nice talking to you, Charming. Take care of yourself.”

“You too. Bye,” Odette said as he quickly went back to his table and soon left with his friends.

She watched, crestfallen. How long was it going to take for the love of her life to return the same feelings? Was she just kidding herself? Worse, she recalled needing to get the invite from Beth for the ball. Everything was so complicated right now.

Then her mind drifted toward the shoes.

Chapter 6

ODETTE WAS TORN between focusing on her life in the real world or returning to the magical realm. Sure, she still had the task of getting Carl to like her and repairing the friendship with Beth. But both were tasks not accomplished in a day. They would take time, and her parents were still away on their trip. Alone in the house, she didn't have a lot to do while staying away from the internet and the horrible bullies. It seemed that the slippers were the only thing not dead set against her in this world right now.

She tried to resist the temptation of putting the shoes on, but they seemed to call to her. Ever since wearing them, there was an invisible pull to try them on again. The prince was always in the back of her mind with his brooding stare and charming demeanor.

Was this just the residue of dealing with magic or something more sinister? He was a dark elf after all. Perhaps there was a spell tempting her to return. But if so, why didn't he just trap her there last time? No matter the lineage, he and his guests seemed quite kind and welcoming when she first arrived. She shouldn't judge them based on the fact that she believed that black elves were evil.

With a sigh, Odette went to the room and took out the shoes. She felt a warm glow in her hands and, without another thought, slipped them on. They fit like a glove, and all her worries seemed to melt away. Soon her clothes transformed into another beautiful gown, this time red with ruffles. Still looked from the past but didn't diminish its beauty. Her hair was done up in beautiful braids with light makeup to help her face pop. Pointy ears and crown included.

Getting up, she was immediately transported to the ballroom again. No hard pull or mirror image this time. Perhaps repeated use or lack of nerves made the dimension jump easier. Either way, she was immediately greeted by guests who were happy at her return.

It was as if she was in a fairytale with people of various looks and positions bowing to her and saying she was the mysterious princess here to

bring joy to the solemn elf prince. That her last visit felt like a lifetime ago.

All their words puzzled her, but it was nice being missed and remembered unlike her existence barely registering back home.

The handsome prince rose from his throne when their eyes met. “You returned, I thought you were scared of being trapped here.”

The look of elation on his face made her heart race in her chest. How could she bring about so much emotion in a magical being but not spark a romance with Carl?

“There are different types of prisons, dear prince.” Odette spoke in a voice clearer than her own. “I came here to dance not talk about the issues from the world where I dwell.”

She was surprised by this. Were the slippers making her more confident somehow? She did want to dance and forget her troubles. Perhaps the magic was just putting forward what she wanted.

The prince bowed and kissed her hand. A look of mischief twinkled in his eyes. “I would never refuse the desires of a lady.”

He looked at the musicians. “Orchestra, put on our best music. Odette and I wish to dance until our feet forget what it means to walk.”

A grin played on his lips, and she laughed.

They danced for what seemed to be hours. Both laughing and taking turns leading. Edrahil taught her multiple dances and elvish terms as they twirled across the floor. Even asking about her thoughts on the kingdom and a few about her home. It was nice letting go with a stranger who treated her like a friend, maybe even more. The memory of home faded to the back of her mind. It was the time to enjoy being in a magical realm and forget her troubles.

When she was too tired to continue, he had her sit down and have some refreshments. After gaining some strength, she took compliments from some of the guests before the prince led her out. She wasn’t used to being the center of attention for positive reasons. The people seemed to genuinely want to get to know her and talking seemed to come naturally. No hint of

magical intervention to be found. Perhaps she was shy because she was an outcast.

The prince led her to the gardens, and soon they sat on a bench. She breathed in the aroma of the flowers and sighed. This kingdom was so wonderful. No wonder the shoes were so priceless if they led anyone to such a fantastic world to explore. Cinderella really lucked out finding a prince from another world. If only more girls could be that lucky in life.

“I’m glad you returned, little fairy. It’s nice being around you again,” Prince Edrahil said.

Odette felt a blush coming on. She knew it had to be just kind words, but it felt like more. After the novelty wore off, she was sure he would look to another girl. After all, the females there were a thousand times more beautiful.

“Thank you. I had a hard day back home. I was hesitant to return at first but knew here I would be more welcomed. Sorry if that sounds silly.”

“Not at all. I am sorry your people make you feel out of place,” the prince said. “Here, everybody loves you. Perhaps they were curious at first but you talked to them with such kindness and honesty, no one could leave that ballroom without falling for your charm.”

Odette giggled. She never had anyone tell her she had charm before. Her last name was ‘Charming’ but that was far from how her personality had ever been perceived. At best, she was shy and at worst, a stuck-up bookworm or a dowdy know it all, according to others back home. Her parents and Beth thought she was fine, but family and friends had to say nice things.

“Truly though, I must tell you that you are special to me. Only a fool could miss your vibrant heart and kindness. Some might not value such things, but I do. Also, there’s courage in you that I sense has not been fully tapped but well forged through personal trials,” he noted.

She blinked several times, wondering if this was indeed just a dream. Why would someone who barely knew her make such proclamations? These words were meant for someone better, smarter, more beautiful than herself. Perhaps dark elves were obligated to say nice things.

“I must ask you something.”

The prince nodded.

Odette gazed into his eyes. “You said you ruled dark elves. What does that even mean?”

Edrahil chuckled. “Have no fear, we are not harmful to other creatures unless we are threatened. These are titles that go with our powers and elven lineage, no more.”

“That’s good, I’m not sure I could be a warrior princess, so that’s a relief,” Odette said then caught herself.

She was supposed to be humoring the prince, not flirting. After all, this was not her world. Then the reality of everything came crashing back. No matter how happy she was right now, it was temporary. Midnight would come, and she would have to leave. Plus, her life and friends were back on earth. Messy as it was, that planet was still her homeworld.

“Did I say something to trouble you?” the prince asked.

“No, I’m glad we are here together.”

Odette leaned against him. Perhaps it was wrong, but she was too tired to be more distant. He had been kind to her. The least she could do was remain open.

Sighing, she looked at the sky with as many stars as the one on earth. “May I ask why I always see you waiting on the throne, looking solemn?”

“I await the love of my life. It is crucial that I find her soon,” the prince said.

“The love of your life? Do you expect her just to walk inside your palace and make herself known?”

He smiled. “Something like that, beautiful one.”

She giggled. “Shouldn’t you be looking for her then instead of keeping me company?”

He tilted his head to the right and fluttered his perfect eyelids. “You’re an outsider, even if you have pointy ears and a beautiful figure like an elf.

You are unaware of all the magic that rules this world and the promises that were made in the past and are now ready to be collected."

"Yes, on earth, we don't have magic. Life is simpler, I guess."

"Yet, you don't seem happy."

"Sometimes, I feel as if I don't belong there."

He grabbed her hand and kissed it. "Maybe you belong here."

"Don't be silly, prince. I could never stay here." She looked at the magical slippers and wiggled her feet around. "Plus, the magic in these won't let me stay."

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Not yet. Would you want to stay?"

"My family is there, and I need to face the problems in my life. As much as I enjoy it here, it's not my place." She got up and leaned in front of him. "But we can be friends, and I can help you find your lover. Do you know what she looks like?"

"I have an idea."

"She must be the most beautiful elf in this world. Maybe you should invite other elf princesses to keep you company."

He shook his head. "It doesn't work like that, kind princess."

"What will happen if you don't find your princess soon?"

"My heart will wither away in unhappiness, and I'll die a sad, lonesome death."

Her hands folded against her chest. "That's terrible. Why are you just sitting there in your throne instead of looking for love, then?"

He gave her the same sad smile that he had when she first saw him.

Odette grabbed his hands and pulled him to his feet. "I don't want my new friend to die. Maybe you could travel to other worlds to find out if your promised one is there. I don't know about the elf world, but in my world, many girls dream of having a charming prince on their arm."

"Alas, the prophecy assured that my promised one would come to my kingdom and would fall in love with me."

“Did it say when?”

“No. Just that I had to throw a party every night when I was old enough to rule. My father will proclaim me king next year. The clock is ticking, and if I don’t find her before I’m king, then I’ll eventually die of unhappiness.”

“That’s not a nice prophecy. Can’t you have another one done? Do you have seers to help you? There must be a way to change your fate.”

Stepping closer, he looked down on her. “Do you worry about me, Odette?”

“Of course, you are my friend and have been nothing but kind to me.”

“Then …”

She put her hand on his chest and looked down. “This is so sad. It seems we are both cursed to be rejected by the ones we love. Your princess isn’t showing up, and the love of my life doesn’t realize I exist.”

“T-the l-love of your life?”

Turning around, she sauntered down the path. “I’ve loved Carl since the moment I first saw him. I thought it was meant to be. You know? Love at first sight. He’s my Prince Charming, but I don’t know how to make myself seen.”

His hand touched her shoulder, and she stopped. “How can someone not notice your existence?”

“I’m not pretty enough for him.”

“That’s nonsense.”

She turned to look at him. “Not in my world. In my world, I’m weird and don’t know how to talk to people.”

“Odette …”

She sighed, and the first stroke of midnight sounded.

Looking around, she saw the portal appear not far from them. Of all the rotten luck, the moment she was pouring out her heart, the night was over for her.

The prince looked from the portal to her. “I understand. You need to leave now, right?”

She nodded. “I’ll be back soon.”

He smiled. “I would like that.”

Her lips curled into a smile. “Have a great night, Prince Edrahil, and don’t give up. Your beloved will show up.”

He waved goodbye when she stepped into the portal and was taken back to her home.

Chapter 7

FOR THE NEXT few days, Odette put all of her effort into getting Carl's attention and back in Beth's good graces. Both were important to her, and the ball would be pointless without them. Her best friend had to be there cheering her on and giving her excellent advice. Plus, she had to do a better job of being there as well.

Carl was the man of her dreams, so he needed to be her date. His ex seemed determined to act as if nothing had changed so he was still free. Whether in hopes the other girl would return or planning to pick a new girl at the last minute, she was unsure. But as long as he was single, she stood a shot, and that was what mattered at the moment.

After a lot of planning on how to get back on Beth's good side, Odette talked to Ken despite being nervous. Beth's brother was desperate to make up for that disastrous weekend. Upon hearing how things had gone sour with his sister, he suggested a bait and switch to get Beth to meet. So far, Odette's attempts at a talk were met with glares or walk-offs. Her friend had switched to the silent treatment. A sign that if things weren't fixed soon, their friendship was over.

Wednesday night, at a fast food restaurant, Odette waited nervously inside a booth toward the back. They were numbered, and Ken had told Beth that was where he would be. Hopefully, her friend didn't see the deception and storm out.

Odette asked him to hang around, but even Ken was too scared of his sister's wrath once the truth came out. Much as she wanted the company, it would be unfair to pit the siblings against each other. He had put his neck on the line enough.

"Ken, you better share those curly fries with me or else." Beth slipped into the booth without looking up. She was dressed to impress as usual and was texting a mile a minute.

Upon looking up and realizing it was Odette and not her brother, she spat, “What are you doing here?”

Odette tried to remain calm. Still, the glare emanating from Beth promised massive devastation for this deception. No wonder Ken made himself scarce before the imminent apocalypse.

“I know this was a mean trick, but we need to talk. It might be too soon for you, but I feel our friendship is in real danger. You are my best friend, and I want us to be close again.”

“So, I can give you beauty tips and soothe your ego?” Beth muttered as she ate fries.

The hard crunch emphasized just how unhappy she was. Usually, she was a dainty eater.

“I didn’t realize I was being such a terrible friend,” Odette confessed. “Please, give me another chance. If you want nothing to do with me finding a dress or being with Carl, I can live with that. I want to know how you are and what you need. Like a real friend would.”

Beth smiled as tears welled into her eyes. She wiped them away and sipped on her soda for a while. Not looking up or answering for what felt like forever.

Sighing, Beth spoke, “I always want to be there for you. But that weekend you seemed so into yourself and pushed me aside. It’s partly my fault for pushing you to be someone else. I love the shy, kind Odette I know. Not the broody closed off one that appeared with all the stress of getting Carl and a dress.”

Odette was shocked that was how she came off. That was beyond self-absorbed.

“Well, that girl is gone. If you want to forget the invite, we can focus on other things. I can always try to date Carl on my own time. If he can’t see me as a winner then that’s his loss,” she said with a confidence that was not natural to her.

“Look who put on her big girl pants,” Beth said with a look of glee.

Odette laughed, and they spent hours talking about their day and all their plans that didn’t include dating or going to balls.

***

The boutique seemed to loom like a monster waiting to devour her. Now that Beth was out, she had to do the makeover on her own. It was better to have her best friend back without a shopping a buddy than losing what they had overall. Still, finding the perfect look was going to be a challenge. Some of the employees in other stores actually mistook her for an older woman. Which was extra shameful since she now wore contacts. It had to be the clothes, but she had not gained enough confidence to wear other outfits yet.

Worse, the search for the perfect makeover artist for her makeover had been disheartening. Some even suggested plastic surgery including nose and boob jobs. None of that was for her. Plus, her parents would lose their minds if they returned to find their daughter with a new face or silicone breasts.

After a few visits, she could see how some people developed eating disorders or worse. Why was it so hard to just to do a few tweaks?

Instead, she aimed her energies into finding the perfect dress. After visiting many places already, it would be nice if the place she was in had the perfect outfit. A dress perfect for bringing Carl to her side and becoming his girlfriend.

Odette was so focused on the search for the right outfit, she didn’t notice a group of university students enter the establishment. She picked three dresses that might be at least a good match and headed to the dressing room.

“I want to try on the brand new shoes that you reserved for me in the back,” a voice rang out that made her blood run cold.

Luck could not be so bad that this cheerleader of all the girls was at the boutique. Chastity Hill, the boastful head cheerleader and Carl’s ex. The

girl took personal pleasure in bullying anyone inferior, and rumor was she broke up with Carl because he was too soft on losers. Chastity was as vapid and mean as they come.

Odette tried to keep her mind on the dresses she was trying on. The first was a strappy eggshell-colored dress that made her feel like all she needed was an ice-cream cone. Then her stomach rumbled. She had skipped lunch because she was so nervous about coming here alone. A decision she was quickly regretting now that she was a whole bag of nerves and hungry. An unfortunate combination since she had to hide until Chastity and her goons were gone.

The second was a pink ruffled dress that actually looked really nice. It seemed to make her body look more shapely and added color to her pale complexion. She could almost imagine the shoes bringing up a version of this dress to go meet her elf friend. The one who thought he would die of loneliness. Pushing that thought to the back of her mind, she checked the price tag. The dress was costly, but she could afford it with her emergency credit card.

The third dress was green and bulky. She felt like an overdressed actress, playing mother nature. It looked nice on display but was clearly not the one for her. Still, it had lovely designs of roses and vines from the waist down. For now, she would be satisfied with finding a lovely pink dress.

“I want to see if this skirt makes my ass look fat,” a female burst in the dressing room. “Oh, I’m sorry,” she apologized and went into a different stall.

Odette was stunned silent. The girl wore a cheerleading uniform, and she could only pray her clothes hung up by the side went unnoticed.

Once, a cheerleader cackled that her two-pieces made Odette look like a zebra. The teacher told everyone to be quiet, but the damage had been done. She heard neighing behind her all day until leaving campus.

It soon became clear that she had to come out. Edrahil thought she was brave. Perhaps it was time to put that in motion and not let these girls get to her. At least she could try and fake being confident.

Odette walked out with her chosen dress in hand.

“Stacey, you were right. It’s her,” Chastity cackled. “What do you have there, Charming?”

“A dress. I’m heading home.”

As Odette turned, a face full of chocolate shake hit her head on. Her scream brought several attendants running. By the time everything was sorted, turned out that a jock had dumped his drink on her as a prank. The store forced the group to leave, but it was too late. The dress was ruined, and it was a one of a kind design.

Edrahil was wrong, Odette was nothing special. Just a joke with not more than a week left to find the perfect dress and a makeover.

Chapter 8

ODETTE WAS ALMOST in tears when she appeared in the ballroom of Prince Edrahil's palace. After everything, she felt like a complete failure. Why did people like Chastity always have to go after anyone different? Believing she had finally hit a stride only to be set back to square one. Finding a dress and getting ready in such a short time seemed impossible. She had no idea how to do this by herself. Her last option would be to sneak into the Moonlight Ball with the shoes, but they kept sending her into the Elves' realm. So, magic couldn't help her this time.

The guests were immediately by her side, offering words of comfort. The orchestra came to almost a complete standstill. She was crying before being led to a chair and given a glass of water. It was embarrassing having strangers take care of her. But also a comfort that they cared so much. A magical realm offering her more support than the world she was from seemed both a blessing and a curse. Sooner or later she had to leave this place, again.

The prince was soon at her side. He never said a word, just held her and allowed the tears to flow. How could such a kind person have a hard time finding his beloved? If not for Carl, she might be ready to at least give Edrahil a chance. Hell, right now a part of her wondered if choosing a mortal man over this loving elf royal might be a mistake. Everything was upside down, and she had no idea how to fix anything and get on with her life.

"I'm sorry for getting so emotional," Odette apologized to everyone. "I just had a terrible day back home, and I believe that my plans for a special event have been ruined. I have a ball back in my world but thanks to some awful people, I might not even have the strength to go."

"Well, you can always come back here," one of the guests suggested.

"Are the balls in your world better than ours?" another asked.

"No. I don't think they are. They are just different."

“Then why do you want to go?”

“Everybody who is anybody in my college is going. My best friend is going.”

“But if it makes you feel so anxious, you should come here instead.”

Odette sniffed and cleaned her tears. “I appreciate everybody’s kind words. But this is something I need to do. I need to be brave and face my fears.”

“The humans in your world don’t deserve you,” someone else said.

“It’s not that bad,” Odette mumbled. “Earth is not that bad. I’m just not like the other girls, I guess. My parents always said that I’m too sensitive and that I’d rather daydream than live in the real world. But that’s okay. Dreaming is okay too. My books give me pleasure and coming here makes me happy. Still, if I want to survive in my world, I need to …” She looked at the prince.

As if reading her mind, Prince Edrahil rose to his feet and took her by the hand. “I think Princess Odette needs some fresh air. Please carry on with the party. A ruler couldn’t ask for kinder subjects, but I’ll take my leave with the princess for a private conversation.”

“Make the princess happy again, my prince,” voices said as Odette followed Prince Edrahil to the garden.

Her heart raced, and her cheeks became pink with the sudden walk. Yet tears still fell from her eyes. She looked at the two moons and the stars and felt terrible for being sad with such an amazing night on display. She was in a magical world with an elf prince. She should feel special.

They sat down and silently looked at the sky.

When Odette felt strong enough, she spoke. “I’m sorry for ruining your party.”

“I just threw the party hoping that you’ll show up. I even hired acrobats to entertain you, but you seem too sad to be interested in that tonight.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t need to be sorry. Just …” He held her hands and looked at her. “Just stay here with me and don’t go back to your world. You’ll be happy here, and no one will dare to make you feel bad about yourself.”

Odette’s heart drummed, and her breathing went shallow.

“We’ll party all day. I can show you my world, the huge mountains of snow in the Winter Court, the most beautiful gardens in the Summer Court. The dancing silver fairies in the Black Forest of my kingdom. We also have flying Glyphs who carry us up in the skies and takes us to the Bird people’s kingdom. Then there’s magic that can dress you as beautiful as you want.”

“That sounds exciting.”

“And there’s me. I’m here to keep you company and take you to all those places.”

“You are a kind friend.”

He grabbed her hands tighter with hooded eyes. “Odette. My Odette, we need to talk.”

“We talk all the time when I’m here.”

“Yes, but I need to talk about something vital that concerns you and me.”

Odette leaned forward with widened eyes. “Prince, may I ask a favor of you?”

“Whatever you want.”

“Do you know how we can fix the magical slippers? If I could stop them from coming here, I could use them to have the most beautiful and old-fashioned dress to go to the Moonlight Ball.”

His voice became sad. “Stop them from coming here? Don’t you like to visit me?”

“I do, but … I also need Carl to notice me. Even if I don’t go to the ball with him, maybe he will still fall in love if he notices me at the ball and asks me to dance with him. Just like Cinderella when she goes to the ball, and the prince falls in love with her at first sight.”

He looked at their hands together. “Just like Cinderella. And you believe that Carl is your prince, right?”

“I’ve loved him since I first saw him.”

The prince clenched his teeth. “Little fairy, there’s something important I need to tell you, and you have to listen to me carefully. Understood?”

She sighed. “It’s okay if you can’t fix the slippers. I knew that it was a difficult request.”

He cupped her face with his hand. “Odette, look at me and listen. Are you listening?”

She nodded, and the prince removed his hand from her face.

“There’s something essential that you need to know about those slippers.” He paused and breathed deeply. His eyes fell on her lips. “Cinderella’s godmother wasn’t just any fairy. She also didn’t just help Cinderella from the kindness of her heart.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why do you think there’s no register of the name of the kingdom where the fairy tales happen?”

“It’s part of a literary rule when telling fairytales. The time and place are facultative and often unnamed.”

“That’s because it usually happens in other realms. Some beings can travel between kingdoms, and a few humans are fated to marry outside their race. Prince Charming was a royal elf, and Cinderella was a human. Humans weren’t seen as more than slaves back then. It was just after their marriage that the laws changed, and humans were treated with respect. But I’m rambling.” The prince brought her hands to his lap. “My mother, the Queen of Elves, made a deal with Cinderella. Magic doesn’t come without a price, and your ancestor was willing to pay for it as long as she married the one her heart desired.”

“What sort of deal?”

“Some elves are born without a companion among their race. I was her only son, and the Fates foretold that I was destined to spend my existence in solitude without being able to experience true love.”

“That’s a scary fate.”

The prince nodded. “I was a child and had no idea of what that meant. My mother, on the other hand, decided to go against fate and play by her own rules.”

Odette leaned closer. “What did she do?”

“She studied all the probable futures and discovered that my soul-mate would be born into the Charming bloodline. But once Cinderella married the elf prince, their descendants would be living on earth. Not to mention that powerful forces were against them meeting and they would never marry and have children. My mother intervened in return for a promise from your ancestor.”

Odette frowned and bit her lower lip. “Why do I have a bad feeling about this?”

“The magical slippers are connected to that promise.”

“Edrahil, what was that promise?”

“The Charming family was destined to give birth to my beloved but living in different realms would set us apart.”

Odette removed her hands from his.

The prince continued, “The deal was that when any of the Charming females came of age, she should try the slippers and see if they fit. If they did, then the chosen one would be teleported to my kingdom where we would meet, fall in love, and get engaged. That’s the reason why the slippers are still in your family’s possession. They have been waiting for you to be born.”

Odette’s head spun out of control, and she tried to fully understand the extent of Edrahil’s words.

The prince moved closer. “I’ve been waiting for you, for so long, Odette. I’ve been throwing parties since you’ve come of age. The news that a female was born into your lineage had filled me with hope. But I couldn’t go to you and change fate. I had to wait for you to come here.”

“My parents would never agree to marry me off as if I was a thing and not a person,” Odette claimed, jumping to her feet. She looked at the

slippers. “These slippers haven’t been used for ages. As far as I know, they can fit any other woman who is truly destined to be with you.”

“Why not you?”

“I’m in love with someone else. You know that.”

“Then why does my heart …” He got up. “Do you really care so little about me after I’ve told you what will happen if I don’t find my beloved?”

A chill ran down her spine. “I thought you were my friend and cared about my feelings. Trying to trap me here with you isn’t caring.”

“Do you think that I’m trying to trick you and that my story isn’t true?”

“You are a dark elf,” Odette accused.

He touched his heart. “I’ve been nothing but kind to you. Every time you came here, we treated you with respect and love. Your presence has given me hope that my existence can be saved, and I might be the kind and happy king that my subjects need to rule them. Yet your words now … they hurt me deeply and stripped me of hope. How can you be so indifferent?”

“Edrahil,” she gasped taken back by his accusation. “How can you be okay with what our ancestors did?”

“How can’t I be okay with meeting my soul-mate? If my mother didn’t do this, we were fated to be born and die without meeting. How was that fair?”

Odette stepped back. “Will you really die if you don’t find your queen?”

“I’ve lived too long on my own. The prophecy was the only thing giving me hope.”

Did elves lure people with magical objects to make bargains that affected others down the line? Putting on these slippers didn’t make Odette ready for marriage by a longshot.

She waved her hands as panic set in. “This is all a huge misunderstanding. I’m not the one you’ve been waiting for. My arrival here was a mistake, and these slippers are probably broken and fit any woman

with my last name. Our ancestors were selfish and mean. I can't be your wife when I'm in love with someone else."

"You believe you are in love with someone who doesn't even acknowledge your existence," the prince retorted with eager eyes. "In my kingdom, you will want for nothing. I will see to your happiness every day and night."

Odette only felt worse after hearing that. She had to nip this in the bud. "Edrahil, you know I love Carl. I wish this deal didn't exist. My entrance was an accident not the fulfillment of some old prophecy."

"As a human, you are confused by the deal process in my land," Prince Edrahil spoke with a serious expression that made her remember he was royalty and much older than what he looked. "Your ancestor, Cinderella, made a deal with my mother long ago. The price for her happiness was a promise that one of her descendants would marry me. A pact that can't be broken once made. I am meant to be with a descendant of her bloodline. It is fate and nothing can change that. The slippers were left with your family so it would bring me my bride and save my heart from withering. That woman is you, Odette, and if you just accept your destiny, we can be together."

Odette was appalled by his insistence. "Are you saying that I don't have any other choice than to accept being your queen even if I don't love you?"

"No, the slippers show who has been chosen. It's still your decision," Edrahil retorted.

"Well, I need to go. This is too much to process right now." Odette turned to leave. "I came to unwind and be around people who respected me. Now you are telling me that I'm here just because your mother set in motion a plan where one of my relatives needs to marry you. That's just sick."

The stroke of midnight cut her rant short. It was both a bittersweet ending to their conversation but also a relief.

"Goodbye, Prince Edrahil. I'm not sure when I will return again for now."

“Wait.” Edrahil followed her. “Please let me explain things better.”

Odette ignored him and looked for her way out. He never lost stride with her, not even when she started running.

“I’m sorry,” Odette said and entered the portal to return to her world.

The prince, however, grabbed her hand. “Promise me that you’ll come back.”

As she pulled and fell back, one of the slippers came off her foot, landing on the ground. Before she could do anything, the portal took her home.

The look of horror on the prince’s face mirrored her own as his world disappeared from sight.

Chapter 9

ODETTE SAT ON the cold floor, sobbing her eyes out while holding the single glass slipper in her hands. How could things go from terrible to catastrophic so fast? She truly believed going to see the elf prince would lessen her troubles but now she was in for it. Perhaps this was karma for using the prince as a balm when he had his own issues. Beth had been right about her self-centered side. Her elf friend would die without choosing a beloved, and she just wanted a shoulder to cry on. Losing Carl didn't mean life or death, just a lonely life.

She had struggled to see if the slipper would work alone. But other than a slight shimmer, nothing happened. Both were needed to activate the real magic. Not even anything about her appearance changed and that was a big part once you excluded entering other realms. How was she going to explain what happened to the other slipper without looking like a complete loon?

She had to find a way to explain the loss of a priceless artifact to her parents. Of all the valuables in their home, this was their most precious possession. They had gone away on a business trip and decided to trust their responsible daughter with the house and its contents. What a complete disaster she made of the whole thing. What was she going to say when they showed up, and she had nothing to prove how the slipper got lost leaving only one of a pair?

Claiming to be transported to a magical realm was out of the question. She didn't want to end up in an asylum or kicked out altogether. While her parents believed they were descended from Cinderella, it was not their opinion that entire new dimensions existed. They didn't even believe in life on other planets much less elves and teleportation to lavish parties. She was going to have to face the music once they arrived and that would be horrible.

Odette decided to call Beth. Maybe coming clean to her friend would help find a solution. With the slippers separated, it would be a task

convincing her best friend. But since Beth's parents claimed to be descended from Sleeping Beauty, perhaps they had magic of their own. It sounded crazy when she thought about it out loud, but no more than jumping dimensions to dance with dark elves and chatting with his friendly subjects.

"Beth, hi! I know that it's late, but we need to talk," Odette said when the line picked up. "I have something crazy to tell you, and it just can't wait. Beth, why are you being so quiet? I promise that it's not about Carl or shopping, so I'm following the boundaries you set."

A yawn was the only answer. "Sorry, Odette. I think Beth and I switched phones by mistake." The voice was male and definitely someone who was getting more sleep than she was. "I can text her to call you if you want. Remember, Ken is always in your corner."

"That's okay, Ken. I'll just talk to Beth on campus tomorrow. Goodnight." She hung up.

It was as if the world was aligned against her. Her best friend always triple checked to ensure the phone was there. Now all of a sudden the brunette got careless? That was quite a coincidence. One that didn't sit well for the stressed and exhausted. She was going to sleep and sort this issue out later.

Hopefully, there was a way to turn things around.

***

"So you just wanted to ask me my opinion on why Chastity attacked you?" Beth asked as they exited class. "Then why wait until after midnight to do that? Are you a gremlin and never told me?" she teased and nudged Odette who pretended that bony elbow didn't hurt.

Odette knew she couldn't get away with being glib or dashing off. Beth would be like a dog with a bone and never leave her alone. Which would make solving the slippers fiasco alone a bit of a challenge.

“I was kind of spaced out and didn’t really realize how late it was. Sorry about disturbing Ken. Your brother is a nice guy, and I hope you two are still close.”

“Like two peas in a pod.” Beth grinned. “But I heard about what happened to you at the boutique. I can’t believe that bitter harpy was willing to go that far in public. It’s my fault for letting you go to that store alone. Chastity doesn’t like losing and even if she dumped Carl, in that cheerleader’s mind he was still someone that was good to be around.”

“I saw her with a star basketball player from another school on my social media field this morning. Does that mean she’s going to keep Carl from dating anyone else while she’s snogging with guys whenever she wants? Sounds hypocritical,” Odette noted.

“When you are hot and have the right connections, words don’t matter,” Beth mumbled. “I want to see the day when she’s put in her place. Until then, we just have to avoid Chastity and hope that karma will come around and teach her a lesson. Maybe she’ll even hit the news for the wrong reasons.”

Odette giggled despite herself. It would take some serious situation for Chasity to hit the papers. As the mayor’s daughter, she had many privileges including most people in power giving her a pass in order to please the mayor. “You are terrible but completely correct.”

“I do my best, but right now my family is having some crazy drama,” Beth admitted.

“What is it? Can I help out in anyway?” Odette immediately offered support.

“Sorry, it’s private. I might be scarce online and the phone, but text Ken or me. Anyway, I have to go soon. Bye.” Beth gave her a hug then hurried off toward the parking lot.

“Great, my best friend just disappeared on me,” Odette muttered. “What other surprises do you have in store for me, universe? Haven’t I suffered enough?” She looked around to see if anyone else noticed that she was talking to herself. Shaking her head, she decided to go back home

before things got out of hand and someone spread the rumor she was going insane. Which wouldn't be too far from the truth.

***

Odette went up to her room for a nap. To her horror someone was inside, sitting on the edge of her bed. Whoever it was would get a solid zap with her taser.

"How did you get in here?"

"Odette, it's me, Edrahil." The handsome human looking male held his hands on the air. "I swear I'm not here to hurt you. I came to return your slipper and ask you a favor."

She was blindsided at recognizing the voice. It sounded slightly different, but that was him. The elf prince from the magical dimension.

"How did you get here? I tried to go back, but both slippers are needed to work. I tried over and over again and couldn't undo my mistake."

"I was at fault too for grabbing you. I stepped out of line, and I'm sorry." He presented the other slipper.

Odette let out a cry of relief and grabbed it.

The prince folded his hands behind his back. "Glad to see you happy."

"You are a lifesaver! If my parents returned and saw this missing, I would be grounded for life." Odette practically danced around the room.

"I used a location spell to track where on earth you were. It took some discussions with a grumpy sorcerer to get me here, though," Prince Edrahil revealed. "Traveling through portals is risky. Especially when you don't have an item to anchor you. Still, I drank a human changing potion and hurried over to see you again."

Odette's mouth opened with the revelation of everything he had to do to find her. "I'm sorry for your trouble."

He smiled, and everything in her world seemed to go back into place until she shook her head and put the slipper on her bed.

Tilting her head, she asked, “Why are you looking at me like that? Do you still believe that nonsense that I’m your promised one?”

“I’m just … even without the magical slippers, you are beautiful, little fairy.”

Odette blushed heavily. “T-thank you. But you are exaggerating.”

“I’m not. Your beauty is more than your face and body, the aura around you is stunning.”

She frowned. “Aura?”

“Your life force.”

Odette giggled. “Only you would say something like that.”

“Are you okay since we last met? You seemed so sad, and I’m afraid that my revelation might have only increased your anxiety.”

“Losing the slipper made me feel far worse.”

“How come?”

“I borrowed them without my parents’ permission. I shouldn’t have been in your kingdom. For that, I apologize. Without the slippers in the right place, you can never find your beloved. That made me feel worse.”

“But, Odette …”

She raised her hand to stop him from talking. “It’s no use, our encounter wasn’t fate but just a misunderstanding. But since you came a long way to return the slipper, I’ll let you tell me what you want from me.”

“I was hoping that you’d have changed your mind.”

She shook her head. “I love Carl. You are handsome, kind, and a prince. Yet we aren’t fated.”

He bowed down his head. “Well, then, this favor I’m going to ask you will make a lot more sense.”

Odette waited for him to talk. But he seemed hesitant. “Whatever it is, if I can help, I’ll do it.”

“I want to borrow the slippers. You say that you weren’t meant to meet me. That it was a misunderstanding. Then, if I borrow the slippers and ask

other females to try them on …”

“Are you going to travel around your world?”

“My world and the other known worlds. I’m tired of just waiting. The slippers are fated to tell me who my beloved is. If not you, then I need to find out the one who they truly belong to.”

Odette massaged the back of her neck. “I’m not sure if … For how long will you need to borrow them?”

“Only for a few days in this world time. I’m throwing a huge party at my palace before I travel to other realms. Many princesses will come to test the slippers.”

Odette’s eyes grew bigger as her heart grew heavier. “You are? A party with princesses …”

“The most beautiful ones in the seven kingdoms.”

Her lips trembled, and she felt her eyes sting with unshed tears. Why was she feeling so badly about the prince meeting with other women?

“I can give you something in return,” Edrahil said with eager eyes. “For your help and willingness in lending me your family’s heirlooms.”

Her eyebrow arched. “What can you possibly offer me?”

“I can grant you a wish,” the prince replied. “I can help you in fulfilling any desire you have.”

“A wish?”

“Don’t you have something you truly want but don’t know how to get it?”

Odette nodded. “You know I do.”

“Tell me what you want then.”

“It seems so trivial compared with what might happen to you if you don’t find your beloved.”

“We are friends. If you are sad, I’m sad too.”

Odette bit her lower lip and walked to her bed. Sitting down, she combed her hair with her fingers.

“There’s that guy, Carl.” She raised her head to look at the prince. He nodded. “I love him, but he doesn’t know I exist. I want to go to the ball with him. If we can have a date, then we can talk and fall in love.”

“So, you want exactly the same as your ancestor Cinderella,” he mumbled with widened eyes. “It feels rather ironic.”

Odette leaned her face against her hand. “You are right. I want to go to a ball to meet my Prince Charming.”

The elf prince straightened up and offered her a big smile. “Wish granted. Consider me as your godmother. Well, godfather. I’ll give you a total makeover and find you the perfect dress if you lend me the magical slippers.”

Jumping with happiness, Odette rushed to his side and presented her hand to him. “We have a deal!”

“Okay, let’s go then.”

Odette put a hand in front of his chest and stopped him. “You can’t go around my planet dressed like that.”

“What is wrong with my clothes?” the prince asked, opening his arms and showing his silver embroidered jacket that belonged to the Victorian era and not the modern times.

Odette giggled. “Have you ever come to this planet before?”

“I’ve just come once to the earth kingdom, long time ago. I’m not familiar with your customs. How do your people dress? Like you?”

“No. I’m too old-fashioned for this era. But my father has plenty of clothes, and we can borrow some. You are taller than him, but we can make this work.”

“Okay, I’ll let you teach me your ways, milady.”

Odette muffled her laughter against her hand.

Chapter 10

WITH SO LITTLE time left to get to the Moonlight Ball, everything was in overdrive. It was time to define a plan and execute it.

When Edrahil suggested a love spell, Odette balked, stating that Carl had to fall for her naturally. A makeover was the most she was willing to do.

For her, it was still odd getting accustomed to the way elves saw the world and their willingness to resort to magic to solve their problems. Though, the prince made it clear that love spells were among his least favorite magic. That he was just trying to be helpful. That truth at least relieved some of her anxiety in seeking his help.

The next day, she knew it would be inconsiderate to leave him at the house, alone. So she offered to take him to college. Only after stopping by some stores and getting him more clothes to wear. He was a huge fan of buttoned shirts and rocker tees. Perhaps the latter being the main clothes Odette's father dressed in for college was rubbing off on the hot human looking elf. Either way, she had no idea how to adequately cover for him at school other than he was an exchange student.

"Who's the hottie?" Chastity immediately shoved her aside upon entering the quad. "Hey, handsome! What are you doing with a girl like her when you can hang out with me?" She leaned in close, chewing bubblegum and wearing one of her skimpy little outfits.

"Pardon me, but you should really apologize for pushing my friend."

Chastity widened her smile. "What friend?"

Edrahil pointed at Odette who shook her head profusely with a pained expression.

"I did it on purpose. Why should I apologize?" Chastity claimed.

Edrahil frowned. "That's extremely rude. What did Odette do to you?"

“She’s just insignificant. I’d rather know more about you? Are you new here? I’ve never seen you before? Do you play football?”

All her questions seemed to bore the prince who looked at Odette. “Are females always this rude around here?”

Odette placed herself in front of the prince and smiled at the cheerleader. “I’m sorry, Chastity. Ed …” She looked back at the prince and then at the girl. “Edward is from England. He’s an exchange student, and it’s my job to show him around.”

“Ugh.” Chastity sneered and folded her arms. “If he’s stuck with you, he might think all the girls are weirdos around here. Just step aside and let me show him around. I’m better than you at this.”

Odette looked back at Edrahil and moved her head for him to walk away.

“Rude girl, don’t you feel cold walking around in just strips of cloth?” he asked, looking at Chastity’s costume.

“What? This is my cheerleading outfit.”

“Oh. Does that mean you are someone important around here?” Edrahil asked.

Flipping her hair back, she smiled. “You might say that.”

“Come, Ed. We are going to be late to class,” Odette said, grabbing his hand.

“Okay,” he said, following Odette down the corridor. “There are a lot of humans around here,” he mumbled as he strode beside her.

“Wait for us,” Chastity said, running with her friends behind them. “Charming, don’t try to hide your new friend from us. That’s not right.”

Odette rolled her eyes and sneered. “That witch!”

Edrahil smiled. “I didn’t know there were witches in this realm.”

Odette looked at him and the bad mood dissipated. “It’s a different kind of witch.”

Chastity stopped in front of them. “You could take your friend to see the game later on. He can watch me cheerleading. What do you say? Do

you want to go, Ed? Do you like football?”

“I’m more into sword fighting and horse riding.”

“Oh, that’s so British!” the girls sighed in unison.

Odette looked at them with widened eyes.

Chastity leaned closer. “I love horse riding. My English cousins also practice fencing. What part of England are you from?”

“London,” Odette replied, grabbing Ed’s arm and rushing away. “This is not good. Not good at all.”

“Ed, wait!” Chastity was waving at him as if she had lost her mind and had suddenly become infatuated.

“Are you performing any kind of magic, Edrahil?” Odette asked, walking faster.

“No. But … elves have this effect on humans. Except you. You don’t seem to be affected by my charm.”

Odette stopped and looked around for a place to stay away from prying eyes. But everywhere she turned, the women around focused on Edrahil and became awestruck.

“Oh, he’s so handsome,” one sighed with folded hands.

“He’s dreamy, just like a prince. And his hair …”

“Is he a movie star of some sort?”

“Odette is with him. How lucky of her.”

Odette looked at the prince who was trying to ignore all the hovering females.

“Can’t you turn off the charm?” Odette asked him.

“His hair looks so soft,” one girl said, walking toward him with half-closed eyes. Her hand raised to touch him.

“Young lady, please refrain from touching me without my permission,” he grumbled at her.

“So dreamy!”

“Odette.” Edrahil looked at her with begging eyes.

She put herself in front of him. “Mine, back off, now!” she muttered at the girls who recoiled back with widened eyes and scared expressions.

Pouting, they left and focused their attention somewhere else as if a spell had been broken and their lives returned to normal.

Odette placed a strand of hair behind her ear and sighed. Then, she realized what she had just said and turned red from head to toes. She gently turned to look at Edrahil.

“Not mine, mine. It was just something I said for them to back off.”

He smiled widely and leaned his face closer to hers. “Were you jealous?”

Odette rolled her eyes. “Of what? I just saved you. Show some consideration.”

“Is Carl more handsome than me?”

Odette’s expression changed from annoyed to happy. Smiling, she put her hands against her chest and felt as if she could walk on air, remembering Carl’s handsome face and tall figure.

Sighing, she chirped, “He’s just dreamy and nice. It’s impossible not to love him.”

Edrahil’s expression changed into a sneer. “Let’s go. Don’t we have a class to attend?”

Odette stopped him from leaving, placing her hands on his chest. “I have a class to attend. You need to stay in the library and lay low. Maybe read a book or play on the phone I gave you. I taught you how to use the internet.”

“I’d rather be with you,” he said with a serene expression. Putting his hands over hers, his lips spread into a smile. “I’m here to help you. I need to know the hunting ground and meet my adversary. Where is he?”

“Adversary?” Odette raised her eyes from their hands and focused on his face. “He’s not your adversary. He’s my future husband.”

“I’ve expressed myself badly. I want to meet my target so I can understand what type of girl he likes.”

“Like Chastity,” she replied. “Blonde and … I’m sure she has a big heart, somewhere.”

“Blonde and mean? He sounds shallow just like that other girl.”

“Carl isn’t shallow!” She pursed her lips and grabbed his arm. “Let’s go, or I’ll be late. You’ll meet Carl after my classes.”

Edrahil followed her as his eyes roamed around the place.

***

Her classmates had become silent once Odette entered with Edrahil, and he sat beside her. He kept asking questions and answering them offered Odette a distraction from the gazes burning on the back of her head.

Edrahil looked like a kid, and she couldn’t blame him for wanting to know things. It wasn’t his fault either that he was so handsome and charismatic. She had to deal with that and make him less attractive, somehow.

Looking at him, she felt her heart sink in her chest and her stomach twirl. How could she make him less attractive? That was the most impossible task ever. Even with long hair, he looked like a top model.

“Why the sad face?” Edrahil asked.

“Not sad, just … You can’t come to my classes every day. The teachers will question, and our cover will be blown.”

“I can use magic to keep that story true. Don’t worry about that. No one will question the reason I’m here. At least, no professor. I like to know where you spend your days. It’s different from what I do on a daily basis.”

“I’m going to start calling you Edward. Your name is different, and I can’t call you prince, either.”

“I understand.”

Odette rubbed her hands together. “I should have asked for an easier wish.”

Edrahil rubbed her shoulder. “Don’t feel anxious. I’m here by your side. Everything is going to be okay.”

She smiled and actually felt better. His smile always helped her to feel less nervous. “You are a good friend.”

Her happiness was short-lived when Chastity sat next to her.

Odette snapped her head at the cheerleader and noticed that she was wearing a pink blouse that covered the revealing outfit.

“What are you doing here?” Odette gasped.

“I’m attending classes, like you.”

Odette looked around. “You normally sit in the back.”

Chastity beamed. “I felt that I needed to be here so we could talk.” She looked at Ed. “Do you like Shakespeare, Ed?”

“My grandfather enjoyed inviting him to our home and had a lot of stories to tell us about him.”

Odette’s head slowly turned to look at Ed, and then she looked at Chastity.

Chastity rolled her eyes up and put her index against her cheek. “Your grandfather? When was Shakespeare born, Odette?”

“He’s being silly,” Odette explained. “He meant his great-great-grandfather. He’s from England, remember?”

Chastity nodded and smiled goofily.

“What did I say that was silly?” Ed asked with a sincere expression.

Odette leaned closer to him and spoke in his ear. “Shakespeare has been dead for ages now. Humans don’t live as long as your kind. She might not be very bright, but she can do basic math.”

“Okay. Sorry about that.”

“Did your family really meet him?” Her eyes narrowed with a tinge of curiosity. “Did he recite his verses to your grandfather?”

Edrahil grinned. “How do you think he knew so much about fairies?”

“*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is my favorite play.”

“I like Romeo and Juliet better,” Chastity interrupted.

Odette snapped out of her dreamy state and wiggled back to her seat. Fixing her dress, she opened her notebook and placed the pens, one by one, next to it.

“Do I need one of those to be here?” Ed asked.

“I can lend you a pen, and I have a free notebook,” Chastity chimed.

Odette narrowed her eyes and forced herself not to growl like a savage beast.

“I brought his stuff, you don’t need to bother,” she said instead with a polite fake smile.

Grabbing her bag, she removed another notebook and gave Edrahil some of her pens. Smiling, she showed him the book they were reading in that class. “Have you ever read this one?”

Ed shook his head. “Are we supposed to talk about it in class? Do we have to memorize it and then recite it?”

“No. Just talk about how we feel about what’s written here.”

“Okay. That’s easy.”

Chastity leaned closer to Odette. “Can I talk to you?”

She looked at her sideways. “What do you want?”

Chastity scribbled on her notebook. “Well, Charming …”

“Odette,” the young woman muttered.

“Odette,” Chastity corrected herself, “I want to apologize for what happened at the boutique. My friends over did it, and I feel bad about ruining your dress.”

“Okay.”

“If you want beauty tips, I’ll totally help you out. Doing away with those terrible glasses was a great start.”

“Beauty tips …” Odette tried to prevent her jaw from dropping.

“Yes. We could have lunch together. You, me, and Ed.”

“I have other plans,” Odette mumbled when she realized the game that girl was playing.

“So, can I have lunch with Edward?”

“I go where Odette goes,” Ed promptly replied which made Odette smile widely with the look of confusion on Chastity’s face.

Her attention was drawn to the person arriving next to them.

“Hum, why are you in my seat?” Beth demanded, stopping next to Chastity with folded arms. “Chastity, since when do you sit up front unless you’re cheerleading or at a fashion runway show?”

“Maybe she wants to gain some knowledge. There’s a seat behind me if you want,” Edrahil spoke.

Beth looked at him and then at Odette. “Why are you sitting in the middle of these two, and who’s he?”

“This is Ed, an exchange student,” Odette explained.

“Her friend,” Edrahil added with a smile.

Beth looked from Odette to Ed and then to Chastity. “Is Chastity your friend too?”

“No, she’s here because of Ed,” Odette grumbled.

“Then, just leave them be and sit next to me,” Beth suggested.

Odette looked at Ed and then at Chastity. “I’m sorry, but I can’t leave Ed alone.”

He smiled at Beth. “Odette is showing me the college, and she’s going to read with me.”

“That sounds like something she would do,” Beth agreed. “Okay, for this class, I’ll sit behind you.”

Beth’s grumpiness seemed to dissipate, and she took a place behind Ed and Odette.

Odette looked behind and assessed Beth’s condition. “Are you feeling okay?”

“Only confused by what’s going on. But Ed seems nice.”

He looked back and smiled. “Are you Odette’s best friend?”

“Yes, since we were really young. Where did you meet Odette?”

“We chatted online before he got here. He’s staying at my place, too,” Odette was quick to reply.

“Your place.” Beth’s lips curled into a wide smile. “Have your parents returned from their business trip?”

“Not yet.”

“Don’t they mind that you’re sharing your home with this …”

“This?” Odette arched an eyebrow.

“Oh, right, you just have eyes for …”

Odette got up and covered her friend’s mouth before she said the forbidden word and Chastity heard it.

Beth pushed her hand away. “Chill.” When Odette sat down, Beth leaned closer to Ed. “Where did you come from?”

“London.”

“Are you liking it here?”

“I really am enjoying this country,” Edrahil replied. “I have been reading up on so much, and I am anxious to see if your architecture is just as glamorous as back home. You mortals do so much without ma—” He was cut off when Odette kicked him. “Sorry, people are cool.”

“They are,” Chastity sighed. “I’m throwing a party next Wednesday. Want to come?”

“Will the man Odette crushes heavily on be there?” Edrahil asked.

Odette wanted to crawl under the table and die. Thank goodness Carl wasn’t in that class. But that didn’t mean word wouldn’t get around.

She pushed Edrahil back. “He’s just kidding. A joker this guy.”

“You mean my ex, Carl?” Chastity blathered on. “Yes, he’s going to be stopping by. All the cool people are going to be there. You can bring Odette and help make her more popular.”

“As long as she wants to, I’m willing to attend.” The elf smiled.

Chastity stared at Odette with an intensity rivaling the sun. “Say you’ll be there.”

“Um, okay? Can Beth come too?” Odette inquired. “Ken’s on the team.”

“Sure.” Chastity perked up. “See you there, Edward. We’ll have fun, there’s even a hot tub out back.”

“Sounds delightful. Is this the educator?” Edward noticed the older teacher enter. “Excuse me, sir, but why are you so late?”

“Ed!” Odette didn’t have enough blood in her body to become more flushed than she already was. She momentarily pondered hiding under the desk, but she couldn’t leave Edrahil on his own, or he would cause even more trouble. She simply grabbed his hand and squeezed.

Meanwhile, the professor looked up at the strange young man with a glare which soon turned into a smile. “My daughter had a tantrum when I took her to school and wouldn’t leave the car. Sorry about being late.”

“Oh! I’m glad you take care of your offspring,” the prince said. Then, he looked at Odette and their hands together.

She squinted her eyes and grabbed his hand harder as she muttered, “Please, stay silent for the rest of the class.”

“Okay,” he said with a nod, but instead of releasing her hand, he held it against his chest.

Gulping, Odette leaned closer to him. “Ed, I’ll need my hand to take notes.”

“You write with your right hand. This is your left hand,” he retorted.

“I still need my hand back.”

Edrahil pouted, and that made her smile.

“Who’s throwing a tantrum now?”

He spoke closer to her face. “If you weren’t letting me keep your hand in mine why did you give it to me in the first place?”

“To shut you up.”

He looked up as if musing about her words and then at her. “That makes sense.”

Chastity leaned closer to Odette. “Are you two dating?”

“Of course not!” Odette pushed her hand and leaned away from Ed’s side.

“Quiet!” the professor instructed with a serious expression. “Let’s continue our class where we left it last week. I need a volunteer to read.”

A couple of students raised their hands, and Odette lowered her head, trying to keep herself from trouble and gossip for the rest of the class. When she looked at the prince, he was holding her book and looking for the page the teacher had instructed. He looked handsome and righteous. She wondered if the elves had universities where they learned literature and mathematics like humans did. There was a lot she didn’t know about Edrahil’s world. He was much more than a sad prince sitting on a throne while waiting for the love of his life.

Chapter 11

ONCE THE CLASSES were over, Edrahil took Odette to several stores to look over the clothes. He went to the more expensive, high-end stores, sensing they had the perfect outfit for her. Highly critical of the material, he mumbled about fairies having better craftsmanship and needing silkworms from up north. She had to warn him to use his inside voice, so people didn't think he was insane. Though with all the people being enchanted, who would report him? It was both cool and scary to watch.

"We will have our work cut out for us, but I'm sure we can do this," the prince said with a reassuring voice. "For now, let's get you some outfits for the party tomorrow. Along with makeup and hair accessories to turn you into the beauty, you think you need to be. I love you as you are, but I made a deal."

"Thank you for understanding, I really want to make a good impression." Odette smiled.

They ended up taking home bags stuffed with clothes. A fashion emergency counted for the special credit card, right? There was no turning back now, and Edrahil was a drill instructor making her try on different styles and used magic to help make items move on their own to fix her hair and makeup. She yelped when a curling iron floated above her head.

"I wasn't sure we could pull this off, but you're doing a great job," Odette confessed.

"Of course, I'm magical, and your other best friend," Edrahil praised himself. "Besides, what kind of wish granter would I be if I didn't do the job well?"

***

Odette also did her part. Teaching him about the human world. Though he seemed happy speed reading through a lot of up-to-date content. He perked

up once she introduced him to the internet and immediately fell in love with Google and Netflix. He seemed to enjoy the detective stories but tolerated a few of the soap operas to make Odette happy.

They called for take-out and ate at the house. When dining out, he fell in love with sushi and Chinese food and asked the cashier for the recipe. Odette had to pull him away. He liked the pancakes she cooked but hated anything that came pre-cooked in a box or can. Claiming he could taste something nasty and fake. He also declared that Odette's tea was the best he ever drank.

"At least you love lemonade made with lemons. My arms are tired from squeezing so many. Why didn't you use magic?" Odette sighed, sitting with him on the couch.

"I wanted us to do something together without magic or deals." Edrahil ate his fill's worth of pancakes. "Did I do something to offend you? Have you hurt yourself?" he asked, panic in his voice.

"No, I'm fine." Odette calmed him down. "This was different, and I'm glad you are here. Even if you had no magic, I would be delighted to have you watching Supernatural with me."

"The show looks interesting." Edrahil settled in beside her and focused his attention on the TV.

Three hours went by, and Odette moved on the sofa and fought off sleep. Smiling, she looked at Edrahil. "What are you thinking?"

"The characters from your favorite show would kill me. Why do you like these serial killing brothers? I know some wonderful demon bloods." Edrahil shook a finger at the screen.

Odette sighed. "It's just a story."

"About handsome serial killers," he muttered.

"Are you jealous of them? You, the most awesome elf prince in your kingdom?"

"Not jealous, but you seem to like to look at them."

"I like to look at you …" She snapped her mouth shut and hugged a cushion. "I won't let them kill you if they find you. Okay?"

Edrahil smiled, and she felt her cheeks burn.

“They couldn’t kill me even if they tried. I’m a powerful elf warrior. What can two mere humans do to me?”

“Throw salt and holy water to mess up your hairstyle,” she joked.

“Ugh. Silly little fairy. One would assume that you don’t enjoy my company when you are evil to me.”

“I’m not being evil. You just have gorgeous hair. Plus, you didn’t want to cut it short even if it would make you look more earthling.”

“Elves are proud of their hair. Like you are proud of yours.”

“My hair is just plain boring. Flat and washed out.”

“Your hair is gorgeous. Stop saying nonsense.”

She arched an eyebrow and grabbed a chunk of hair to look at it. “There must be something wrong with your vision.”

“You’re the one wearing glasses.”

“I forgot where I put my lenses,” she mumbled. “This is my plain, boring human form without the magic help of the slippers.”

“I like this form,” he mumbled.

Odette raised her head to look at him and saw his gentle smile.

“I’ve already told you, Odette. There’s more to you than a face and a body. Don’t sell yourself short. Okay?”

She nodded. “I’ll find something else for us to watch.”

The elf prince sighed and folded his arms. “As long as you don’t put a movie of humans killing any supernaturals, I’m fine with it. It’s too scary to watch. There’s a reason why we don’t mingle with them.”

“Mingle with who?”

“Humans. They are all short-sighted and greedy. Except you. You are funny and kind.”

“Thanks, I guess,” Odette said, changing channel after channel until she found a movie.

She didn’t remain awake for much longer. Nevertheless, she woke up in her bed the next morning.

Chapter 12

“I’M nervous.”

Edrahil rushed to her side and looked at her. “Why?”

“The ball is in nine days, and this party is my only opportunity to speak with Carl.”

“Carl, I can’t see why you like him. He seems … stupid.”

Odette glared at him. “Carl isn’t stupid. Just because he’s a jock, it doesn’t mean he’s not clever.”

“You haven’t exchanged more than a few words with him, how can you know if he’s stupid or not?”

She looked at the prince sideways. “You don’t know him either, so why are you being judgmental about someone you don’t know?”

Edrahil muttered, “All I know is that he makes you suffer because he has no idea you exist. That’s enough for me not to like him.”

Odette’s grumpiness softened with his words. Smoothing down her clothes, she looked at herself in the mirror. The ringlets cascading around her face were perfection, great makeup and the outfit made her feel very confident. Instead of going to the overly sexy route, Edrahil had focused on emphasizing the assets she already had. Nothing that stopped at her buttocks or breasts was an option. She wore a black halter top, a pleated red skirt, a silver necklace, and black high heels. The skirt stopped just above her knees, and she felt exposed. But he promised that this was the best semi-decent outfit to attract males.

“You look ravishing, my dear.” Ed’s breathing caressed her neck.

Placing a curl behind her ear, she bit her lower lip. “We still haven’t found the perfect dress for the ball. Not that it will matter if Carl doesn’t even look my way tonight.”

“We’ll find it tomorrow. Godfather’s word,” the elf prince said, showing his pinky.

Odette giggled and crossed her pinky with his.

“How do I look?” he asked, turning around.

She gulped and felt the blood rush to her cheeks. Despite not being from this realm, the elf prince seemed to have the gift to match his clothes and always look impeccable and handsome in anything he put on. That night his chestnut hair was perfectly coiffed, and he wore an open buttoned shirt with stripes, a blue shirt underneath, and a pair of skinny black jeans with laced shoes.

“You look great. I’m sure all the girls at the party will be drooling over you.”

“Not all,” he mumbled, fixing his collar and gazing at her by the mirror.

Odette averted her eyes from his hot-looking figure. Heat rose from her stomach and made her chest hurt. Breathing deeply, she thought about Carl—her target. Falling for the royal elf prince wasn’t in her plans.

Minutes later, they were leaving the house, and Odette was driving them to the party.

“I don’t want to mess this up,” Odette said, squeezing the wheel.

Edrahil gave her shoulder a squeeze. “You look amazing. No man is going to say otherwise.”

***

At the party, people had already started crowding Edrahil. Excited to meet the new guy who was so charismatic. Odette tried to stay with him but they were soon separated and Chastity’s family estate was huge.

What was she going to do without her guide to help? She did her best not to look awkward and smiled when a guy flirted with her instead of fleeing.

“What are you doing here all alone?” A random guy, who looked a decade older, started following her around. “A pretty miss like you should

have a guy on her arm. I have some party favors in my car if you want to unwind more and really get into the scene."

"I'm fine, just waiting on a friend." Odette tried to shake him off. "Please go."

"Are you trying to reject me?" The guy's voice took on a threatening tone.

"Buzz off jerk." A jock suddenly walked up. "She's Ed's friend, and he told us to make sure she's happy. I don't think she wants to talk to you."

"Like I'm afraid of you," the guy scoffed, but soon a crowd formed. "Who are you people?"

Beth stepped forward and threw a drink. "I just arrived, but I will kick your ass! Get lost!"

Soon other guests were throwing missiles at the man, and Odette fled out front before she could get soaked. This whole situation was getting out of hand.

"Odette, are you okay? I heard a guy was bothering you," Edrahil called out, standing in the parking lot. "Come on over and meet some of my new friends." He waved.

She stormed over and pulled Edrahil away. "Did you tell people to attack a man? It is a madhouse inside. If they kill him, you are going to need to disappear, forever."

After mumbling a quick apology and kissing her on the cheek, Edrahil ran inside to calm down the mayhem. She almost felt sorry for being hard on him. But it was necessary.

"What's your deal with Ed? He's cool!" one of the jocks called out.

Odette sighed. "There's a situation inside. Don't worry, Edward and I are cool."

"Of course, they are. He told us that the Charmings are taking care of him." Carl walked up to her. "Hey, Odette, Ed was telling us that you were planning to go to the ball. I think you might have mentioned it to me before? We don't talk as much as I would like."

“You would like to talk to me?” Odette was almost at a loss for words. Carl was standing rather close with a goofy grin and a drink in his hand. With so many hot chicks at the party, it was surreal that he wanted to talk to her.

“Of course! Come sit with us. We’ll make sure no more jerks try to take advantage of you.” Carl led her over to the group. “Everybody, this is Odette Charming. Now, don’t go making fun of her last name. It’s cool, we all have something people think is different, but we’re still awesome.”

“Right on,” Ken agreed, drinking liquor straight from the bottle. “My sister is still mad at me, but I’m fine. Just look at me, I’m the picture of health,” he burped.

Actually, he looked like hell with bags under his eyes and the start of a scraggly beard. Was Beth so mad she missed that her brother was starting to look like a drunk hobo? How could she fix this?

“Hey, Odette.” Carl took her hand. “I never noticed how beautiful your eyes are. Those glasses were hiding your true beauty. I know Chastity is hot, but you are so beautiful. Like in a soft, normal way. I hope that I’m making sense. My ex is a Ferrari and you are a sleek SUV.”

Odette was not sure how to take the car reference. She was happy about the eye reference, but SUV’s were huge. Was he stating that she was pretty but fat? Why couldn’t he have compared her to some other top luxury vehicle? He could only do worse by comparing her to a VW Bug.

“Um, thank you. I was thinking more like a Lexus, but I guess SUVs are cool cars.”

“I think you look more like a Prius,” a random jock called out, and the rest laughed.

“I totally messed up! Of course, SUV was the wrong example.” Carl sighed. “You just look so amazing, and I’m at a loss for words. Edrahil was acting so cool, and I thought you two might be dating. But he said you already liked a guy, and he was too late to the plate. Whoever that is, he’s so lucky. I would love to ask a girl like you to the Moonlight Ball.”

Odette almost passed out. Was Carl saying he wanted to go to the ball with her? She must be dreaming, or maybe that creepy guy slipped her a party favor.

She wasn't going to throw away that chance. Perking up, she stated, "Well if you still want to ask me, I don't have a date yet. I still need to pick out a dress after the last one got ruined."

"Bummer! But if you're still available, would you be interested in going to the Moonlight Ball with me?" Carl asked her. "I promise to be a complete gentleman, and it will be a night to remember. It seems crazy that I ever had thoughts on trying to get back with Chastity."

"Yes, I will go with you," Odette squealed. "Wait, what is that about Chastity?"

"Nothing." Edrahil walked up. Smiling, he added, "It seems you two are getting along."

"We're going to the Moonlight Ball together," Carl announced. "That's cool, right?"

"Oh, so fast?" The elf looked blindsided. "I mean, that's great. You two make a wonderful couple. I can imagine you going everywhere together and getting … matching shirts."

"That sounds like a cool idea." Chastity ran up and kissed Edrahil on the cheek. "Trying to hide from me, you sexy devil? Every time I turn around you are gone." She leaned in on him as if she were going to kidnap him in front of everyone.

"Carl is taking me to the Moonlight Ball." Odette tried to turn attention to give the elf a chance to slip away. "Anyway, what happened to that jerk from earlier?" She eyed Edrahil.

"He's fine, slipped out back and fled," Edrahil said. "So there was no death, happy now?"

"He's so funny!" Chastity laughed like a hyena, causing Odette to cringe. "But I forget! It's so great that you are going out with Carl, Odette. I know you have wanted this for a while, congrats!" She leaned in and took a picture.

Carl wrapped his arms around Odette and grinned.

Minutes later, Beth came running out of the party. “Odette is it true? Are you and Carl going to the ball together?” She showed Odette Chastity’s latest Instagram post.

“You put that out on Instagram?” Odette turned on Chastity.

“It’s fine, Odette. That’s what the cool people do on the social,” Edrahil said.

“Social media is awesome!” Ken shouted and fell over.

“What are you doing?” Beth demanded and hurried over. “Are you drunk? Mom and dad will kill you! Sorry, Odette, I need to take my brother home.”

“Let me help,” Edrahil offered. “You guys continue chatting with the new ‘it’ couple.”

Odette tried to focus on being happy. She’d gotten Carl as her date at last. But where did Edrahil’s enchantment end and human choice begin?

Chapter 13

THE NEXT TWO days, Edrahil was in full on fairy godfather mode, taking her to various shops and trying on the dresses that seemed to fit her frame and bring out her true beauty. He would not settle for anything but the best, and no one at the stores challenged him. That along with dating Carl had her confident she was living out a modern-day fairytale.

“I thought the red dress with the low neckline was a lovely choice,” a customer rep commented as Edrahil ordered for more dresses of his choice to be brought.

Odette cringed. Trying on that dress made her feel naked. Even Edrahil wasn’t sure that fit her style. Though he did smile for a second. She understood the style fit some women, but she was not the type to go full on sexual. The neckline practically reached her navel.

“We are on a tight deadline,” Edrahil stated. “My friend is planning to wow the man she cares about and only the best dress will do for the ball. I’m sure you will all help us without fail.”

“Of course,” the reps cooed, and even random passersby stopped to wish her luck.

It was both a rush and creepy all at once. Something she should get used to. Being Carl’s girlfriend was not for the faint of heart. His life didn’t lend to wallflowers with trips and lots of parties.

Odette went in to try a golden dress. It had a round neckline that hid her cleavage which was a relief and reached her ankles. The gown shimmered in the light and had different hues depending on the lighting. Yet not so much that it looked like a disco ball. It seemed fit for a princess, but she wouldn’t make the final verdict without Edrahil’s approval. He was the expert after all. She tried not to think about the balls he held in vain in hopes of finding his beloved. Perhaps borrowing the shoes would fix that issue.

“You look like the sun goddess,” Edrahil breathed when Odette stepped out of the dressing room.

His eyes traveled from head to toe several times. The awe in his eyes made her heart leap in her chest, and she grinned with joy.

Then he shouted at the helpers, “I need her to try on shoes wearing this one. Bring shoes from every store you can.”

“You can’t do that.” Odette panicked.

But he did, and the same went with the accessories. Eventually, they left with the dress, matching shoes with a low heel, a silver clutch, and a tiny silver crown. Which he later used magic to add glowing sapphires.

“You will be the most beautiful girl at the ball. Carl will be dazzled,” the elf prince told her.

“He will! Thank you so much, Edrahil.” Odette smiled.

Yet she felt a lump in her throat. As if by choosing Carl, she was making a mistake. But he was the boy she had wanted for so long. Could a chance meeting with an elf prince really change her heart that much?

***

Odette laughed as she entered the house with Edrahil. The makeup artist he had ready for her was a miracle worker. Just the sample makeover had her feeling like a million bucks. Much more subtle than what would be for the ball, but it did wonders. Better yet, the woman didn’t think she needed surgery or gobs of makeup which Odette believed her despite Edrahil’s enchantment. Being geeky didn’t mean you couldn’t be a great beauty too.

“I am glad I was able to help you out so much,” Edrahil said. “I’m sure Carl will be glad that he will have your undivided attention from now on.” He put down the bags on the counter.

“Huh?” Odette said.

Her mind was flooded with thoughts on the ball and how rewarding it would be to walk in with Carl on her arm. It was being held at an art

museum and had several pieces of rare art on display. The dress was formal, but it could dazzle too.

“Remember that I have to go back tonight. I have a kingdom to rule, Odette. It has been great hanging out, but I have to return.” Edrahil’s face took on the most serious look she had seen.

Odette’s shoulders drooped. She had been having so much fun with Edrahil that his life went on the backburner. Of course, he had to go back. Aside from ruling, he had to find the love of his life in order to survive. Despite her best efforts, selfishness seemed to be in her vein. Not to the level of Chastity but a deep desire to do things for herself.

“I know. Sorry, I understand your need to leave.”

To her surprise, Edrahil raised her head with his fingers under her chin. “I will never forget the time we spent together. You have been a great companion. Even if you never felt the way I did for you. I’m glad we met and visited each other.”

Odette wiped away tears as he smiled with a sad expression. Stepping back, Edrahil walked with Odette to the room that held the slippers. Odette’s heart grew heavy with the thought that it could be the last time they saw each other.

“I’m still going to see you when you return the slippers. You don’t need to act as if this our final goodbye,” Odette mumbled.

“I know. I’m just dramatic, I guess.”

This time, Odette hugged him. “I’m going to miss having a godfather. You spoiled me with attention and kindness. I wish you find happiness. I truly do.”

He patted her head but didn’t put his arms around her.

Odette stepped back and looked at him. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing. But I have a final request.”

“Whatever you want.”

“I want you to take this.” Edrahil handed her a beautiful necklace with a blue stone. “It’s magical and can take you to my world when you squeeze

the stone between your fingers and wish to go there. With this, you can be sure the slippers will be returned."

"Thanks, but I trust you."

"I want you to keep this, Odette. It's my gift to you. It will take you to me when you need me. Please, don't reject it."

Odette nodded and accepted it. "I'll never take it off."

The elf prince smiled. "At least you'll have a piece of me with you."

Odette touched his arm. "I don't have words to thank you enough."

Edrahil grabbed her hand and hugged her close. "You will always be a princess in my mind. Never let anyone make you feel less than that. Promise me. Also, tell Beth I said bye. She's awesome, and I'm glad you have a friend like her."

"I promise, and I'll tell Beth you had to go suddenly," Odette said. "Will you come back for the ball? Maybe with a new girl on your arm to celebrate finding your true love?"

Edrahil's smile faltered. "I'll try, Odette. Good luck with Carl, little fairy."

His face became serious as he let her go and moved his hands to perform a spell. The next second, he and the shoes were gone.

Chapter 14

ODETTE DID HER best to keep up with Carl. While the idea of being with him was a dream come true. The reality was a mixture of exciting and stressful. He needed to know where she was almost all the time and even suggested she just wear anything to the ball so she would stop shopping with Edrahil. This possessive side raised several red flags, and she hoped it was just a phase. When she saw Carl with Chastity almost all the time while they were dating, she had assumed it was the mean cheerleader who wanted to follow him around everywhere. She was wrong.

“Odette, the movie is about to start,” Carl complained as she hurried to keep up with him in the parking lot. “I can’t believe you were not there at practice to cheer me on before we left for this group date. Everybody else on my team had their girlfriend or boyfriend there.”

“I told you I had a test and Ken isn’t currently dating anyone at this school. His girlfriend is flying in for the ball, then she’s going back over the weekend,” Odette countered.

Carl glared back at her. “I don’t need you to play the smart-aleck, Odette. My girlfriend has responsibilities to me. When I become a big football star, you can’t be flitting about with friends or have a time-consuming job. You have to be there for our kids and me.”

“Kids? Carl that is far off. Who’s going to watch those children while I work?” Odette was blindsided. There had been so much she hadn’t known about Carl before they started dating.

“You will be. I want at least five kids. Chastity dropped the hammer on two which was part of the reason we broke up. When I suggested she shouldn’t bother with her internship over the summer and start working on babies instead, she slapped me,” Carl said rolling his eyes. “I hope you aren’t as selfish as her.”

Odette stopped short. Chastity had claimed she dumped Carl because he was too soft on losers. But from what he just said, perhaps the cheerleader realized she was dating a chump.

“What now?” Carl demanded. “I swear, you seemed a lot better when Edrahil was here. Is that it? You miss him and want to go to London in Brazil to visit him?” he demanded.

“London is in England, Carl,” Odette grumbled.

He glared at her, and she folded her arms.

“Hey, what’s going on?” Beth walked up with her new boyfriend. “You okay, Odette?” She gave Carl a hard look when he opened his mouth.

“I’m fine,” Odette sniffled. “Carl was upset I missed his game.”

“But we had a test. Brian doesn’t mind that I missed it. Education comes first,” Beth said.

“I overreacted. Sorry, babe.” Carl gave Odette a quick kiss that seemed far from genuine.

“Hey, guys.” Chastity walked up with three guys. “We ready for the movie or what? Hi, Carl! You look sharp. You got those designer sneakers your father has been promising.”

“Thanks, at least somebody noticed.” Carl gave Odette a disapproving look.

Odette had a sinking feeling. If this was his behavior now. What would the ball be like? Scratch that, what would her life be like with him being so clingy and misogynistic?

***

Carl was drinking and laughing at her house. He had decided to hold an impromptu party at her place with only two days left before the ball. Stating that as his girlfriend she needed to unwind. He wasn’t a heavy drinker but his attitude more than made up for that. Including telling her to be quiet when she chastised his friends for trying to sneak inside rooms with locked doors. Claiming that this house was everybody’s house when he hosted a big party.

“So, I am planning to get the most expensive car money can buy once I get my contract.” Carl chatted on while keeping a tight hold on Odette. “A man with means has to look the part. I might be humble in public right now but when I have my own money, the gloves come off, and my girlfriend will get to come along for the ride,” he declared, and everybody laughed.

“That’s great, Carl. I’m certain when I get my paycheck it will help us too,” Odette added.

“Why do you have to be such a wet blanket? I’m talking about my dreams.” Carl turned on her. “We don’t need to hear your whining. Besides, your parents are loaded and will give their daughter anything she wants. You don’t have to work, just ask my future parents-in-law for a good dowry.” He laughed and drank from his beer. “Or a mansion as big as this one. I had no idea you were so rich, Charming.”

Odette frowned at his words and mean spirit. He was a gold digger and a phony.

“I’m not planning to live on my parents’ dime. Plus, my father wants me to inherit the family’s business. I’ll have to work once I leave college.”

“You won’t have time to work if you need to follow me around. I’ll have to move to another state or another city when I sign up with a big team,” Carl announced. “That’s what a good girlfriend does for the man she loves. And you love me, don’t you?”

Odette opened her mouth and then closed it without knowing what to reply.

He grabbed her shoulders and pushed her closer to him. “That’s my girl. Who knew you had such a pretty body underneath those granny clothes. I’m excited about the ball. We’re going to have fun … after.”

Odette looked at him, and her heart stopped beating. His friends continued to laugh and tapped their hands against the furniture, disrespecting her home as if it was a filthy pub.

“Hey, pal.”

Odette looked up and saw Beth with her hands on her hips.

Carl looked at her. “What do you want?”

“Don’t you think you’ve had enough beer?”

“You’re not my mother. You are just here because you’re Odette’s friend or no one would bother to invite you.”

“I’m getting tired of your attitude!”

“Beth.” Brian rushed to her side and tried to scoop her away. Beth pushed him back. “I’m tired of listening to this prick demeaning my best friend. Listen up, Odette is intelligent and has a great future ahead of her. She’s not going to sit on her ass and refuse to run her family business just because some dude thinks his career is more important than hers.”

“Odette is my girlfriend. She’ll do what I want,” Carl said with a plain face.

“She just has to dump your sorry ass, and you can find another girlfriend to bully around,” Beth sneered, closer to his face.

“You can’t talk to me like that. Keep running your mouth, and I will kick you out,” Carl spat.

“You and whose army?” Ken stepped forward. “Don’t ever talk to my sister like that.”

“Calm down, Carl,” Chastity cooed. “You don’t want to be a party pooper. Just because your girlfriend is as fun as a freezer doesn’t mean you have to snap at us.”

Odette’s face burned. “Keep that up, and you will be the one sent packing.”

“Sorry.” Chastity rolled her eyes

“I apologize for being hot-headed,” Carl said, waving his hands for everybody to calm down. “Let’s just have fun and forget about our troubles. After all, the Moonlight Ball is coming up! And we all know what happens there, don’t we?”

Everybody cheered, but Odette and Beth shared a look. She had no idea what they were talking about, and her best friend seemed to be in the same boat.

Carl pushed her arm and forced her to sit closer to him. “Be quiet,” he muttered at her.

For the rest of the night, Odette didn’t know what to do or how to act. When the beer and snacks ran out, her boyfriend and his friends left to eat burgers without saying goodbye.

The place was a mess. Carl’s friends were complete jerks who trashed anything they could without consideration.

“I’ll help you clean up,” Beth offered.

“I’ll help too, Odette,” Ken said with a gentle smile.

“Thank you.” Her hands shook as she cleared the floor and furniture of the empty cans and glasses.

“Are you okay?” Beth asked, next to her. “You look pale.”

Ken joined them. “You do look pale and tired. Maybe you should go to bed and clean tomorrow.”

Odette rubbed her eyes and noticed the black liner on her fingertips. “I’ll just hire a cleaning service when I wake up. You can go back home. Sorry about the mess.”

“Okay, goodnight,” Beth said after grabbing Ken’s arm. “I’ll call you tomorrow.”

Odette nodded as she looked around her living room. Her parents were arriving this weekend, and she needed the house to be spotless.

What was she thinking when she let Carl bully her around?

Her mind drifted to Edrahil. He had been so kind to her and granted her wish. He did everything for her to be with Carl. Yet she was regretting it more than anything in her life.

She wondered how the elf prince was doing. He had taken the slippers and hadn’t returned to see her. Hopefully, his love life was going better than hers. She touched the necklace he had left for her. It was magical and would allow her to enter his world when she wanted to get her slippers back. She hadn’t tried it, and she was too tired to go anywhere else that night. Still, it would be nice to see Edrahil. On the other hand, she didn’t want to spoil his

party and see him flirting with other beautiful elf women. Her chest burned, and she felt weak.

Chapter 15

“WHAT DO YOU mean it’s over?” Odette demanded over the phone. “The ball is tomorrow.”

“I don’t care,” Carl said. “You’re a terrible girlfriend, criticizing me and letting me get bashed.”

“Beth told the truth, you were being a jerk. Did you do this so I wouldn’t find a date in time for the ball? Are you trying to make me not show up?” Odette was almost in tears.

“Well, you don’t want to be there when Chastity and I walk in,” Carl gloated. “A bookworm like you couldn’t handle the embarrassment. Stay home and read or binge some soaps.”

Odette’s face burned. “Listen, you jerk, I am still coming to the ball, and you better believe I will look my best to show the world I’m better off without you.”

Carl went silent.

Odette yelled at the phone. “You are obnoxious, and I regret ever talking to you or even having your lips on mine.”

“You are as caring as an ice cube, don’t feel so flattered. I’ve enjoyed kissing you as much as I would enjoy having my teeth removed.”

“Your breath stinks!”

“Your boobs aren’t real. I know it, and you have fake eyelashes.”

“Chastity is the one with everything fake, asshole. Forget that I exist!”

“Listen, Charming, you better not shame me at the party, you bitter cow,” he snarled and hung up.

Odette was left open-mouthed. How could she fall for such a jerk? All he cared about was being famous, cars, and money. He acted nicer out in public, but now she knew the truth.

***

It was almost ten when she decided to go see Edrahil. The ball was the next day, and her parents would also return. She needed the shoes but really wanted to see him.

When she arrived, the palace looked abandoned. Her heart raced, and her hands shook as she ran on the marble floor, looking for someone to talk to.

There was no one.

The palace looked as if it had been abandoned. There were even leaves scattered around.

“Edrahil, Edrahil,” she called as she ran up the stairs.

On the second floor, she stopped in her tracks when she saw the slippers glowing in a display case.

Where was her prince? Where were the princesses to try the slippers?

Her heart threatened to leave her chest and breathing was presenting itself a challenge.

“Edrahil, I demand you show yourself, right now!” Odette called, clutching the necklace tightly. “Where are you?” Tears ran down her cheeks.

Mist surrounded her, and she suddenly disappeared and landed with a thud on cushions. Looking around, she understood she was in a small room with a glass ceiling showing the constellations up in the night sky. Her heart soared when she saw the prince resting on a round bed. She pushed her body to stand up but fell back when she noticed how glum and pale he looked.

“Edrahil.” She sucked air to be able to speak louder. “What happened to you? Why aren’t you downstairs throwing a party?”

Edrahil’s eyelids fluttered, and he opened his eyes. Sitting up, he looked in her direction, and his lips curled into a timid smile. “Odette. Are

my eyes deceiving me?”

Odette held her hands to the floor and pushed her body to stand up. “Edrahil.” Tears fell down her cheeks once again. Clumsily, she rubbed her sleeve against her eyes.

“Why are you crying, beautiful fairy?”

“I thought you were dying,” she sobbed.

“Not yet,” he replied, laying his head back and covering his eyes with his arm. “I’m sorry for not returning the slippers. I’ve been tired.”

Rushing to his side, she knelt beside him and touched his arm with her hands. “Didn’t you find your princess? Did you look everywhere? Why isn’t anyone here anymore? Where did everybody go?”

“I sent them away. Many females came to try the slippers on. Every single one of them failed.”

“I’m sorry.”

“I knew they would fail. I knew that they wouldn’t fit anyone else.”

“What are you saying?”

“It’s useless. I hope at least that you are happy, Odette. You can take the slippers home and leave me here to my misery.”

Odette’s heart plummeted. “But the slippers were supposed to find your true love. It must fit someone in your realm.”

The prince turned his head to look at her. “Are you happy, Odette? Did I make your dream come true?”

Odette sobbed and shook her head. “Edrahil, I don’t want you to die. Please, don’t die.”

Edrahil sat up and lowered his face in front of hers. “Why aren’t you happy? Is it because you think I’ll die? You don’t need to worry about that. It’s not your fault that my ancestors made such an illicit deal.”

“You just need to live longer so you can find the love of your life. I’m sure that if you throw another party …”

Edrahil’s finger rested under her chin, and she shut her mouth to stare at his handsome face. His eyes were two dark pools of calmness.

“When you’ve lived as much as I have, you know that there’s no remedy for a broken heart and there’s no way to force anyone to love another. I’ll just accept my fate, and you should accept yours. It was nice to meet you, Odette. Even for a short period of time. I had fun. You showed me your world and let me know the part of you that only your family and good friends know. Maybe even a part that they don’t. That makes me happy.”

Odette pushed him back. “Stop saying nonsense. I won’t let you die.”

Edrahil fell back with a pained face. “Ouch! Do you want to kill me faster?”

Grabbing her hair, she stormed over the bed and sat beside him. “I’m so sorry. Where does it hurt?” Her hands roamed down his chest.

He raised his head with a confused expression. “What are you doing?”

“I pushed you and hurt you,” she mumbled, leaning her face in front of his.

His expression was serious when he grabbed her hands and evaded her touch. “Are you taunting me, woman?”

“T-taunting you?”

He tilted his head to look at her and fixed his clothes. “Shouldn’t you be getting ready for your ball?”

“It’s tomorrow night. I have time for that. Not that it really matters anymore.” Biting her lower lip, she placed a strand of loose hair behind her ear. “It’s a shame really. The dress we found is gorgeous. But I have no one to go to the ball with me.”

“What about your jock boyfriend, Carl?”

“We broke up. He broke up. He said that …” She stopped talking and looked away while scratching her nail against the silky fabric covering the bed. “He was a jerk.” She covered her face with her hands. “I can’t believe I once thought that I was in love with him. He’s stupid, and he didn’t treat me well.”

“What?” Edrahil got up from the bed.

“Prince?” Odette got up and rushed after him. Grabbing his arm, she pushed him back. “Where do you think you are going?”

“I’m going to fight with that pig and restore your honor.”

“M-my honor?”

Edrahil turned around to face her. “You said he didn’t treat you well. Did he hurt you? Did he force himself on you?”

“No.” She shook her head. “Nothing like that.”

“He didn’t touch you?”

Odette patted his chest. “Not like that. I swear. He was a bad kisser, though. Cocky bastard.”

Edrahil frowned. “I’m confused. Do you still love him? Was this just a lover’s quarrel?”

“I don’t love him. He’s a misogynistic pig and wanted me to be his trophy wife while he partied with his friends and showed off the fortune he’ll make with his million-dollar contracts.”

“Trophy wife …”

“He and Chastity are back together. They are going to the ball, and I couldn’t care less.”

“When did that happened? Are you hurt? Did he make you cry? Do you want me to kill him?”

Odette blinked several times before shaking her head. “I just want you to get better. Are you feeling better?” She grabbed his hands and placed them against her stomach. “What do elves eat when they are feeling sad? Do you want me to make you some pancakes?”

“I’m not hungry. Let’s just sit on my bed and talk for a while.”

Odette looked back and then at him. “It’s late. I can’t stay here when it strikes midnight.”

“The shoes were the ones preventing you from staying later than midnight. My necklace allows you to stay as long as you want,” he said with a gentle smile. “It may not give you a fancy dress to wear, but it brings you here to be with me.”

“I rather like the necklace, then,” she said, clutching the jewel in her hand. “Edrahil …”

“Yes.” He leaned closer.

“What do I need to do so you don’t die?”

“Odette, don’t you know already?”

Her heart jumped in her chest, and she looked down at her feet. “I’m not a princess or a beautiful elf woman.”

“I don’t want any of that.”

She looked at him. “Then what do you want?”

“I want the one my heart pines for. The one that was born to be with me for all eternity. I want someone who understands me and sees past my royal title and my elvish good looks.”

She moved closer but halted. “What if she has no idea how to express her feelings and she’s afraid that her life will turn upside down because she’ll have to leave everything she knows behind?” She breathed deeply. “Isn’t that the same thing as becoming a trophy wife but with an elf prince instead? So, a trophy wife queen.” She stepped back and waved her hands as her mouth babbled everything her mind was thinking. “Plus, as a human, we don’t live as long as elves. Time is experienced differently here as you said. Maybe I’ll live five days before I become old and ugly. And there are so many pretty women here. But everything seems so much nicer than back home. And my parents.” She covered her mouth. “What will they do without me? I’m an only child. Who will run our business and take care of all those pretty books and relics?”

When she turned to look at Edrahil, he was resting his back against the marble wall with a grin on his face and folded arms.

“Why are you smiling like that?”

“I didn’t realize you had thought that much about us. I guess that’s a good sign.”

She puckered her lips and hid her hands inside her sweatshirt. “I wasn’t talking about me.”

“You were.”

“I don’t even like you.”

He raised his head and his smile faded. “Do you enjoy breaking my heart, heartless woman?”

Rushing to his side, she put her hands against his chest and pushed him against the wall. “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to be this rude. I don’t want to break your heart. You’ll die if I do that.”

He grabbed her hands. “I won’t die if you are mean to me, Odette. I’ll just die if you don’t want to love me back.”

She lost her breath as the heat of his touch climbed up her arms and shot straight to her heart. “You just think you love me because of those magic slippers.”

“Not just because of that, beautiful one.”

“Stop with the endearing names.” She let go of his hands and strolled to the bed where she sat. “I don’t want you to die, but I don’t want to give up my freedom either. Spending the nights in endless balls is not my idea of living.”

He walked to her side and knelt. “Mine either. The balls were just a way to wait for you. Nothing more. I don’t want you to give up your freedom either.”

“I’m mortal. My life compared to yours is … the flame of a match. I’m a butterfly.”

His hands cupped her face, and he moved closer. “Do you like me just a tiny bit?”

Slightly opening her lips, she put her hands over his. “We have fun together. You don’t want me to be something that I’m not. You make me laugh.” She smiled, but tears rushed to her eyes. “You make me happy, and I thought I would die when I didn’t find you downstairs. I thought I would die again when I saw you in bed, looking so pale as if you no longer wished to live.”

Tears rolled down her cheeks. Edrahil raised his head, and his lips caught the salty drops with kisses. “You are the most beautiful fairy in the

whole world, and I’m going to be the happiest king in the seven kingdoms if you decide to let me be your boyfriend.”

“Boyfriend?”

“While you finish your studies and help your family with their business. Then we get married, and we can travel between worlds. My kingdom is in peace, and there isn’t a lot to do. I have ministers to take care of the most pressing matters. And as you said, the life of a human is short compared to ours.”

“But what will happen to you when I die?”

“When we die, we’ll ascend and keep being together and following each other in each reincarnation and form of existence. That’s what will happen. Does that please you?”

“It pleases me us together but not that you die because of me.”

“There’s no life without you. Existing without you isn’t living. Plus, silly beautiful girl, you are a fairy, not human. Your life will be as long as mine.”

“I’m not a fairy, I’m a human,” she grunted. “Are you blind?” She pushed him back. “See, no …” She touched her ears and felt the pointy tips.

He beamed at her and touched the tip of her nose. “Fairy. Just half of a half, but still fairy.”

“How can that be?”

“Your grandmother married an elf prince. Your bloodline is much more than you think it is. You are magical, Odette. You're born to be with me.”

Her face became sober.

“Why the gloomy face, I thought you’d be happy?”

“Pinch me.”

“What?”

Odette grabbed his hand. “Pinch me.”

“I’d rather kiss you.”

“Pinch me first!”

Edrahil chuckled. “This is not a dream, silly.”

She gazed at him. “Then kiss me. I need to know if I like your kiss.”

Standing up, he sat beside her with narrowed eyes. “You need to know if you like my kiss? The nerve you have. Of course, you’ll like my kiss. What’s not to like about me?”

“So cocky!”

His hand grabbed her chin. “Stay still so I can kiss you.”

“You need to be more romantic than that.”

“Always complaining, my little fairy.”

“You are so silly! Can’t you be more …” She stopped talking when his lips brushed against hers and closed her eyes when he pressed their mouths together.

Sighing, she let go and let him pull her closer into his arms. His warmth made her insides melt as his lips made goosebumps trail down her neck and arms. He spread kisses on her face, pressing his lips once again against hers. He didn’t seem impatient, and that made her feel safe and light as a feather.

Her fingers clutched to his coat, and she searched for more contact. “You taste so good. What’s up with that?”

“You taste good too.”

“Really?” She pushed him back. “Don’t I kiss like a …” She looked up, trying to remember Carl’s words. “Does my kiss feel as warm as an ice cube?”

“What are you talking about?”

Odette smiled and covered her red cheeks with her hands. “Does this mean that we are dating?”

He grabbed her hands and leaned closer. “Only if you want to.”

“If we are dating then I have a date to the ball,” she mused.

“Don’t you think about anything else than that stupid ball?”

“Don’t you want to come with me? It’s an important event, and I’ve always wanted to go with the person I loved the most in the world.”

“Your dad?”

“You, silly.”

Edrahil smiled and kissed her again. This time she wrapped her arms around his neck and let their mouths dance against one another.

The prince stopped the kissing and frowned at her.

Odette blinked. “What’s wrong?”

“Are you using me to make Carl jealous?”

“Carl who?”

Edrahil laughed. “Good answer. Then I’ll go to the ball with you. After all, the dress we picked looks perfect on you, and I want to show you off.”

“I’m not a thing to be shown around,” she protested.

“No, you are my girlfriend, and I can be proud of being your soul-mate, can’t I?”

“Soul-mate,” she whispered with a smile. “I like that.”

“I like that too.” He stroked her cheek and kissed the top of her nose. “I’m glad you found your way back to me.”

“I guess sometimes we need to date the beast to appreciate the prince,” she mumbled. “I’ll never break your heart, Edrahil. I promise.”

He hugged her. “Can you stay here with me just for a bit longer. I feel lonely when I’m not with you. You’ve spoiled me with the time we spent together. I even miss watching that evil monster duo kill my relatives.”

“We can go home, and I’ll make you pancakes while we talk and watch a movie together.”

“Blueberries this time.”

“I’ll see if I have some in the fridge.”

He puckered his lips to kiss her again. “My lips feel lonely too.”

Giggling, she pressed her lips against his. Then, she felt a tingle, and when she opened her eyes, she found herself in her own bed with Edrahil

gazing lovingly at her as if there wasn’t anything else in the world that could make him happier.

“I’m going to have a heart attack if you keep looking at me like that.”

He arched an eyebrow. “Is that a good thing?”

She grabbed his hand and walked with him to the kitchen. “Let’s just cook and watch a movie before I can’t take my hands off you. Why do you have to be so gorgeous?”

Edrahil followed behind her with a huge grin. “You’re so bossy. I like that.”

“Good since this won’t change just because I can’t live without you.”

He halted, and she realized what she had just said. Before she could look back to see his reaction, his arms surrounded her waist, and he secured her in his embrace.

His breath caressed her ear and made her shiver. “I can’t live without you either.”

She smiled and rested her back against his chest. Holding on to his arms, she relaxed her body and enjoyed the pleasant sensation that took over her heart and soul.

So, that was love. She could never have imagined it would be this good outside the books she read and the fantasies that she had.

Chapter 16

THE ART MUSEUM, where the Moonlight Ball was being held, looked like it came straight out of a painting. Odette stared and drank in every detail of architecture. From the high walls to the vaulted ceilings, right down to the marble floors. Banners were spread around the ballroom reminding everyone this was a ball for college students. The art in the corner were masterpieces picked explicitly for the occasion. One with fairy creatures made her think of Edrahil, and she sighed with longing.

Beth had to call Odette several times to bring her back to reality.

Both ladies were dressed in their ball gown best. Odette in the golden dress that the elf prince picked out for her. Plus, the makeup and hair were perfect. While Beth wore a blue poufy dress that had her turning several corners sideways to fit. Still, her best friend looked ravishing with her hair in a curly updo and stylish makeup. Beth's date was late, but Odette knew either way that her best friend would be there for her. They watched others dance, giggling when there was a misstep or gazed at the ones who danced like experts from a dance tv show.

"So, you decided to show up." Carl walked up with Chastity on his heels. He wore a traditional black tux with a bow tie. His date had a shimmering silver dress that hugged her frame and barely passed her butt. "I see that Beth got stood up too. No surprise there."

"You look great, Chastity." Odette ignored her ex's taunts. "I hope you enjoy the ball."

"I plan to. Can we go dance now?" Chastity tried to pull Carl away. "They are already wallflowers. They have nothing else to offer or make fun of," she whined.

"In a moment. Go get me some punch." Carl dismissed Chastity who stormed off.

Soon, the cheerleader was seen dancing with another jock, her face utterly delighted.

“Go, Chastity!” Beth cheered. “You look better on his arm anyway!”

“That little bimbo,” Carl seethed.

He soon turned his attention to Odette with his million-dollar smile. “Maybe I was hasty when I dumped you for Chastity. Let’s face it, she was going nowhere fast.” He pulled out a rose. “What about giving me another shot? A pretty girl like you shouldn’t have to sit down all alone during a ball. Plus, we can rekindle what we had.”

Odette gawked at the very idea. After everything, he honestly thought she would go crawling back to him. If she wasn’t more demure, he would have received a slap in the face.

“Absolutely not. You are a jerk, and I’m not interested in you anymore. People make mistakes, and I learned from mine. Now go find another table to haunt. You’re not welcome here.”

Beth cheered along with a few other people. “Tell him, Odette. No one puts down my girl and gets away with it.”

Carl snorted. “Whatever, you’ll regret spurning me.” He stole a kiss on her cheek and turned back.

Before Carl could leave, he halted when Edrahil stood in front of him. “What do you think you are doing?”

“Hey, Ed! Long time no see. Didn’t you return home? What you’re doing here?”

“Edrahil, this isn’t what you think it is,” Odette gasped. “H-he …”

“I know. He dared to put his lips on your face even after you rejected him.”

“So what? Everybody knows that Charming here has a huge crush on me. She loves me. I can do whatever I please. She’ll be crawling back to me as soon as she comes to her senses and stops acting like a little cunt.”

Edrahil’s punch connected with Carl’s face before anyone had the time to register what was happening. Carl walked back several steps before grabbing his bleeding nose with widened eyes. “What the hell, man. Why did you do that?”

“You are talking trash about my girlfriend. Next time you dare to touch her against her will or insult her, I’ll break more than your nose. Do you understand?” Edrahil used his tall stature to intimidate the jock.

Carl looked from Edrahil to Odette, then he grabbed a napkin from one of the tables and pressed it against his nose. Several of his friends rushed to his side, and Odette feared that they would try to hurt Edrahil.

“Are you okay, Carl?” one of his friends asked.

He pushed him back. “I’ll be fine.”

Ken and Beth’s boyfriend moved behind Edrahil who sunk his hands in his pockets, looking the least frightened by what was happening.

“Odette is my girlfriend and my date to this ball. If you touch her again, we’ll have a serious problem,” Edrahil said.

The whispers about what was happening started to resonate inside the ballroom. Quickly, everybody knew what was going on.

Odette hid her burning cheeks behind her hands. “Oh, this is a mess. The ball is ruined.”

“Charming is dating the hot exchange student,” the girls whispered.

“He’s so dreamy,” some other girl chirped.

“Oh, she’s so lucky. I can’t believe how pretty she looks in that dress.”

“Carl is such a douche. Ed is so dreamy. He defended his girlfriend,” someone else said with an excited voice.

“Oh, I want someone just like Ed to date me!”

Odette turned around and felt dizzy as the comments reached her ears.

The floor stopped spinning when Edrahil’s hands secured against her waist. “I’m here. Don’t panic. Sorry for being late.”

When Odette looked back, Carl and his friends were gone. Beth was talking with her boyfriend, and the voices had quieted. It was as if everything had been a bad dream.

“I thought they were going to hurt you,” Odette moaned. Turning in his arms, she looked at him. “Are you okay?”

“I’m the one who should be asking you that.”

“I’m fine.”

“I’m fine too. Did you forget I could turn that idiot into a frog if I wanted?”

She widened her eyes and then smiled. “You could.”

“Instead, I just punched him.”

She covered her mouth and giggled. “You’re my hero.”

“If he ever touches you again, I’ll turn him into a chicken and eat him for lunch,” he grumbled with a serious face.

Her heart raced, and she circled his neck with her arms. “No need to have those sort of cannibal fantasies. You taught him a lesson, and I’m sure he won’t bother me anymore.”

“You’re my girlfriend. He needs to deal with that. Why did you have to be so pretty? Now every single man here wants to date you?”

“What? What nonsense are you saying?”

“Little fairy, don’t you know how pretty you are? How much prettier you become when you stop doubting yourself and embrace your true nature?”

She opened her mouth in awe. “Do I have enchanting elvish powers too?”

He smiled. “Only half of half.”

She patted his chest with puckered lips. “Stop being cocky about your elvish charm.” Then she looked around and noticed that everybody was ignoring them. “The women seemed to have stopped drooling over you. Did you find a way to turn off your charm?”

“I found myself a shield.” He touched the tip of her nose. “Your love is my shield, and while I’m with you, the other women will refrain from trying to eat me alive.”

“That’s good to know. Or I’ll have to turn them into frogs.”

“And eat them?”

“Ugh, no. I would just leave them in a pond somewhere. I’m not that evil.”

His smile brushed against her lips. “You are adorable when you are jealous.”

“I’m not the only one being jealous. You punched a guy because of me.”

“I would do that again. Still, I liked the way you stood up and told him to get lost.”

“I love you, only you. I don’t want anything to do with that jerk.”

He laughed and twirled her around. “Let’s dance, eat, and kiss each other. I promised you that you would have fun tonight. I’m an elf of my word.”

Odette grabbed his face between her hands. “Edrahil, do I make you happy?”

“You are the love of my life, of course, you make me happy.”

“We still need to tell my parents about us. They will have a heart attack.”

“No thinking about the future. We are here to have fun, and I promised my girlfriend that I would dance with her. Let’s go and have fun.”

Grabbing her hand, Edrahil rushed to the dance floor, and Beth and Brian joined them. As Odette taught the prince how to dance to earthling songs, she realized that much like her ancestor, Cinderella, she had fallen in love at first sight when dancing with a prince. Her love story was better than any fairytale she devoured when a child and her prince was more real than any of those she had ever dreamed about. Being a fairy was just a bonus.

The End

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anna Santos is an International Bestselling Author of Paranormal and Fantasy Romance.

She likes to write happily ever after romances with magical and complex characters. All her books feature clever, witty, and strong heroines and dominant males who either get what they want or get what they deserve.

Read A Free Book from Anna Santos

https://www.annasantosauthor.com/thecursedangelsseries

Connect with the author:

https://landing.mailerlite.com/webforms/landing/f6w0w8

Follow her on social media:

Instagram **Facebook** **Twitter**